"A Sorcerer Runs for Sheriff" by ROBERT BLOCH

SEPTEMBER

Weird Tales

15¢

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NELSON S. BOND

AUGUST DERLETH'S Novelette—

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ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

SEPTEMBER, 1941 Cover by Margaret Brundage

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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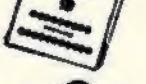

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DO WE HAVE TO DIE?

Is there a Power within that can give Health, Youth, Happiness, Success?

Can we cast off all fear, negation, failure, worry, poverty and disease? Can we reach those mental and spiritual heights which at present appear unattainable? To these eternal questions, the answers given by Edwin J. Dingle, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, are unusual. He reveals the story of a remarkable system of mind and body control that often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, achievement of business and professional success, and new happiness. Many report improvement in health. Others tell of magnetic personality, courage and poise.

The method was found in remote and mysterious Tibet, formerly a forbidden country, rarely visited by outsiders, and often called the land of miracles in the astounding books written about it. Here, behind the highest mountains in the world, Mr. Dingle learned the extraordinary system he is now disclosing to the Western World.

He maintains that all of us are giants in strength and mind-power, capable of surprising feats. From childhood, however, we are hypnotized, our powers put to sleep, by the suggestions of associates, by what we read, and by various other

experiences. To realize their really marvelous powers, men and women must escape from this hypnotism. The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing the mind of the hypnotizing ideas that paralyze the giant powers within us.

A nine-thousand word treatise revealing many startling results of this system is now being offered by the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 38E, Los Angeles, Calif. They offer to send it free to any readers who quickly send their names and addresses. Readers are urged to write them promptly, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

Beyond the Threshold

"Of my grandfather there was no trace. . . ."

I

THE story is really my grandfather's.

In a manner of speaking, however, it belongs to the entire family, and beyond them, to the world; and there is no longer any reason for suppressing the singularly terrible details of what happened in that lonely house deep in the forest places of northern Wisconsin.

The roots of the story go back into the mists of early time, far beyond the beginnings of the Alwyn family line, but of this I knew nothing at the time of my visit to Wisconsin in response to my cousin's letter about our grandfather's strange decline in health. Josiah Alwyn had always seemed somehow immortal to me even as a small child, and he had not appeared to change throughout the years between: a barrel-chested old man, with a heavy, full face, decorated with a closely clipped mustache and a small beard to soften the hard lines of his square jaw. His eyes were dark, not over-large, and his brows were shaggy; he wore his hair long, so that his head had a leonine appearance. Though I saw little of him when I was very young, still he left an indelible impression on me in the brief

A Novelette

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

The roots of this story burrow back into the mists of early Time. And from those dim, dreadful ages came the Wendigo—monstrous, horrible to look upon—haunter of the great forest silences!

visits he paid when he stopped at the ancestral country home near Arkham, in Massachusetts—those short calls he made on his way to and from the remote corners of the world: Tibet, Mongolia, the Arctic regions, and certain little-known islands in the Pacific.

I had not seen him for years when the letter came from my cousin Frolin, who lived with him in the old house grandfather owned in the heart of the forest and lake country of northern Wisconsin. "I wish you could uproot yourself long enough from Massachusetts to come out here. A great deal of water has passed under various bridges, and the wind has blown about many changes since last you were here. Frankly, I think it most urgent that you come. In present circumstances, I don't know to whom to turn, grandfather being not himself, and I needing someone who can be trusted." There was nothing obviously urgent about the letter, and yet there was a queer constraint, there was something between lines that stood out invisibly, intangibly to make possible only

"... and in the east wall yawned a great cavity—*the forbidden threshold beyond which he had vanished.*"

one answer to Frolin's letter—something in his phrase about the wind, something in the way he had written *grandfather being not himself,* something in the need he had expressed for *someone who can be trusted.*

I could easily enough take leave of absence from my position as assistant librarian at Miskatonic University in Arkham and go west that September; so I went. I went, harassed by an almost uncanny conviction that the need for haste was great: from Boston by plane to Chicago, and from there by train to the village of Harmon, deep in the forest country of Wisconsin—a place of great natural beauty, not far from the shores of Lake Michigan, so that it was possible on days of wind and weather to hear the water's sound.

FROLIN met me at the station. My cousin was in his late thirties then, but he had the look of someone ten years younger, with hot, intense brown eyes, and a soft, sensitive mouth that belied his inner hardness. He was singularly sober, though he had always alternated between gravity and a kind of infectious wildness—"the Irish in him," as grandfather had once said. I met his eyes when I shook his hand, probing for some clue to his withheld distress, but I saw only that he was indeed troubled, for his eyes betrayed him, even as the roiled waters of a pond reveal disturbance below, though the surface may be as glass.

"What is it?" I asked, when I sat at his side in the coupe, riding into the country of the tall pines. "Is the old man abed?"

He shook his head. "Oh, no, nothing like that, Tony." He shot me a queer, restrained glance. "You'll see. You wait and see."

"What is it then?" I pressed him. "Your letter had the damnedest sound."

"I hoped it would," he said gravely.

"And yet there was nothing I could put my finger on," I admitted. "But it was there, nevertheless."

He smiled. "Yes, I knew you'd understand. I tell you, it's been difficult—extremely difficult. I thought of you a good many times before I sat down and wrote that letter, believe me!"

"But if he's not ill? I thought you said he wasn't himself."

"Yes, yes, so I did. You wait now, Tony; don't be so impatient; you'll see for yourself. It's his mind, I think."

"His mind!" I felt a distinct wave of regret and shock at the suggestion that grandfather's mind had given way; the thought that the magnificent brain had retreated from sanity was intolerable, and I was loath to entertain it, "Surely not!" I cried. "Frolin—what the devil is it?"

He turned his troubled eyes on me once more. "I don't know," he said. "But I think it's something terrible. If it were only grandfather! But there's the music—and then there are all the other things: the sounds and smells and—" He caught my amazed stare and turned away, almost with physical effort pausing in his talk. "But I'm forgetting. Don't ask me anything more. Just wait. You'll see for yourself." He laughed shortly, a forced laugh. "Perhaps it's not the old man who's losing his mind. I've thought of that sometimes, too—with reason."

I said nothing more, but there was beginning to mushroom up inside me now a kind of tense fear, and for some time I sat at his side, thinking only of Frolin and old Josiah Alwyn living together in that old house, unaware of the towering pines all around, and the wind's sound, and the fragrant pungence of leaf-fire smoke riding the wind out of the northwest. Evening came early to this country, caught in the dark pines, and, though afterglow still lingered in the west, fanning upward in a great wave of saffron and amethyst, darkness

already possessed the forest through which we rode. Out of the darkness came the cries of great horned owls and their lesser cousins, the screech owls, making an eerie magic in the stillness otherwise broken only by the wind's voice and the noise of the car passing over the comparatively little used road to the Alwyn house.

"We're almost there," said Frolin.

The lights of the car passed over a jagged pine, lightning-struck years ago, and standing still with two gaunt limbs arched like gnarled arms toward the road: an old landmark to which Frolin's words called my attention, since he knew I would remember it as but half a mile from the house.

"If grandfather should ask," he said then, "I'd rather you said nothing about my sending for you. I don't know that he'd like it. You can tell him you were in the midwest and came up for a visit."

I was curious anew, but forebore to press Frolin further. "He does know I'm coming, then?"

"Yes. I said I had word from you and was going down to meet your train."

I could understand that if the old man thought Frolin had sent for me about his health, he would be annoyed and perhaps angry; and yet more than this was implied in Frolin's request, more than just the simple salving of grandfather's pride. Once more that odd, intangible alarm rose up within me, that sudden, inexplicable feeling of fear.

THE house loomed forth suddenly in a clearing among the pines. It had been built by an uncle of grandfather's in Wisconsin's pioneering days, back in the 1850's: by one of the sea-faring Alwyns of Innsmouth, that strange, dark town on the Massachusetts coast. It was an unusually unattractive structure, snug against the hillside like a crusty old woman in furbelows. It defied many architectural standards without, however, seeming ever fully free of most of the superficial facets of architecture circa 1850 making for the most grotesque and pompous appearance of structures of that day. It suffered a wide verandah, one side of which led directly into the stables where, in former days, horses, surreys, and buggies had been kept, and where now two cars were housed—the only corner of the building which gave any evidence at all of having been remodeled since it was built. The house rose two and one-half stories above a cellar floor; presumably, for darkness made it impossible to ascertain, it was still painted the same hideous brown; and, judging by what light shone forth from the curtained windows, grandfather had not yet taken the trouble to install electricity, a contingency for which I had come well prepared by carrying flashlight and electric candle, with extra batteries for both.

Frolin drove into the garage, left the car and, carrying some of my baggage, led the way down the verandah to the front door, a large, thick-paneled oak piece, decorated with a ridiculously large iron knocker. The hall was dark, save for a partly open door at the far end, out of which came a faint light which was yet enough to illumine spectrally the broad stairs leading to the upper floor.

"I'll take you to your room first," said Frolin, leading the way up the stairs, sure-footed with habitual walking there. "There's a flashlight on the newel post at the landing," he added. "If you need it. You know the old man."

I found the light and lit it, making only enough delay so that when I caught up with Frolin, he was standing at the door of my room, which, I noticed, was almost directly over the front entrance and thus faced west, as did the house itself.

"He's forbidden us to use any of the rooms east of the hall up here," said Frolin, fixing me with his eyes, as much as to

say: You see how queer he's got! He waited for me to say something, but since I did not, he went on. "So I have the room next to yours, and Hough is on the other side of me, in the southwest corner. Right now, as you might have noticed, Hough's getting something to eat."

"And grandfather?"

"Very likely in his study. You'll remember that room."

I DID indeed remember that curious windowless room, built under explicit directions by great-uncle Leander, a room that occupied the majority of the rear of the house, the entire northwest corner and all the west width save for a small corner at the southwest, where the kitchen was, the kitchen from which a light had streamed into the lower hall at our entrance. The study had been pushed part way back into the hill slope, so that the east wall could not have windows, but there was no reason save Uncle Leander's eccentricity for the windowless north wall. Squarely in the center of the east wall, indeed, built into the wall, was an enormous painting, reaching from floor to ceiling and occupying a width of over six feet. If this painting, apparently executed by some unknown friend of Leander's, if not by my great-uncle himself, had had about it any spark of genius or even of unusual talent, this display might have been overlooked, but it did not; it was a perfectly prosaic representation of a north country scene, showing a hillside, with a rocky cave opening out into the center of the picture, a scarcely defined path leading to the cave, an impressionistic beast which was evidently meant to resemble a bear, once common in this country, walking toward it, and overhead something that looked like an unhappy cloud lost among the pines rising darkly all around. This dubious work of art completely and absolutely dominated the study, despite the shelves of books that occupied almost every available niche in what remained of the walls in that room, despite the absurd collection of oddities strewn everywhere—bits of curiously carven stone and wood, strange mementoes of great-uncle's seafaring life. The study had all the lifelessness of a museum and yet, oddly, it responded to my grandfather like something alive, even the painting on the wall seeming to take on an added freshness whenever he entered.

"I don't think anyone who ever stepped into that room could forget it," I said with a grim smile.

"He spends most of his time there. Hardly goes out at all, and I suppose, with winter coming on, he'll come out only for his meals. He's moved his bed into that room, too."

I shuddered. "I can't imagine sleeping in that room."

"No, nor I. But, you know, he's working on something, and I sincerely believe his mind has been affected."

"Another book on his travels, perhaps?"

He shook his head. "No, a translation, I think. Something different. He found some old papers of Leander's one day, and ever since then he seems to have got progressively worse." He raised his eyebrows and shrugged. "Come on. Hough will have supper ready by this time, and you'll see for yourself."

Frolin's cryptic remarks had led me to expect an emaciated old man. After all, grandfather was in his early seventies, and even he could not be expected to live forever. But he had not changed physically at all, as far as I could see. There he sat at his supper table—still the same hardy old man, his moustache and beard not yet white, but only iron gray, and still with plenty of black in them; his face was no less heavy, his color no less ruddy. At the moment of my entrance he was eating heartily from the drumstick of a turkey. Seeing me, he raised his eyebrows a little, took the

drumstick from his lips and greeted me with no more excitement than if I had been away from him for but a half hour.

"You're looking well," he said.

"And you," I said. "An old war horse."

He grinned. "My boy, I'm on the trail of something new—some unexplored country apart from Africa, Asia, and the Arctic regions."

I flashed a glance at Frolin. Clearly, this was news to him; whatever hints grandfather might have dropped of his activities, they had not included this.

HE ASKED then about my trip west, and the rest of the supper hour was taken up with small talk of other relatives. I observed that the old man returned insistently to long-forgotten relatives in Innsmouth: what had become of them? Had I ever seen them? What did they look like? Since I knew practically nothing of the relatives in Innsmouth, and had the firm conviction that all of them had died in a strange catastrophe which had washed many inhabitants of that shunned city out to sea, I was not helpful. But the tenor of these innocuous questions puzzled me no little. In my capacity as librarian at Miskatonic University, I had heard strange and disturbing hints of the business at Innsmouth. I knew something of the appearance of Federal men there, and stories of foreign agents had never had about them that essential ring of truth which had made a plausible explanation for the terrible events which had taken place in that city. He wanted to know at last whether I had ever seen pictures of them, and when I said I had not, he was quite patently disappointed.

"Do you know," he said dejectedly, "there does not exist even a likeness of Uncle Leander, but the old-timers around Harmon told me years ago that he was a very homely man, that he looked like something that had been thrown up by the sea, as he was, and one old woman said a curious thing: that he reminded her of a *frog.*" Abruptly, he seemed more animated, he began to talk a little faster. "Do you have any conception of what that means, my boy? But no, you wouldn't have. It's too much to expect. . . ."

He sat for a while in silence, drinking his coffee, drumming on the table with his fingers and staring into space with a curiously preoccupied air until suddenly he rose and left the room, inviting us to come to the study when he had finished.

"What do you make of that?" asked Frolin, when the sound of the study door closing came to us.

"Curious," I said. "But I see nothing abnormal there, Frolin. I'm afraid—"

He smiled grimly. "Wait. Don't judge yet; you've been here scarcely two hours."

He went to the study after supper, leaving the dishes to Hough and his wife, who had served my grandfather for twenty years in this house. The study was unchanged, save for the addition of the old double bed, pushed up against the wall which separated the room from the kitchen. Grandfather was clearly waiting for us, or rather, for me, and, if I had had occasion to think cousin Frolin cryptic, there is no word adequate to describe my grandfather's subsequent conversation.

"Have you ever heard of the Wendigo?" he asked.

I admitted that I had come upon it among other north country Indian legends: the belief in a monstrous, supernatural being, horrible to look upon, the haunter of the great forest silences.

He wanted to know whether I had ever thought of there being a possible connection between this legend of the Wendigo and the air elementals, and, upon my replying in the affirmative, he expressed a curiosity about how I had come to know the Indian legend in the first place, taking pains to explain that the Wendigo had

nothing whatever to do with this question.

"In my capacity as librarian, I have occasion to run across a good many out of the way things," I answered.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, reaching for a book next his chair. "Then doubtless you may be familiar with this volume."

I looked at the heavy black-bound volume whose title was stamped only on its backbone in goldleaf: *The Outsider and Others,* by H. P. Lovecraft.

I nodded. "This book is on our shelves."

"You've read it, then?"

"Oh, yes. Most interesting."

"Then you'll have read what he has to say about Innsmouth in his strange story, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth.* What do you make of that?"

I reflected hurriedly, thinking back to the story, and presently it came to me: a fantastic tale of horrible sea-beings, spawn of Cthulhu, beast of primordial origin, living deep in the sea.

"The man had a good imagination," I said.

"Had! Is he dead, then?"

"Yes, a year ago."

"Alas! I had thought to learn from him. . . ."

"But, surely, this fiction," I began.

He stopped me. "Since you have offered no explanation of what took place in Innsmouth, how can you be so sure that his narrative is fiction?"

I admitted that I could not, but it seemed that the old man had already lost interest. Now he drew forth a bulky envelope bearing many of the familiar three-cent 1869 stamps so dear to collectors, and from this took out various papers, which, he said, Uncle Leander had left with instructions for their consignment to the flames. His wish, however, had not been carried out, explained grandfather, and he had come into possession of them. He handed a few sheets to me, and requested my opinion of them, watching me shrewdly all the while.

THE sheets were obviously from a long letter, written in a crabbed hand, and with some of the most awkward sentences imaginable. Moreover, many of the sentences did not seem to me to make sense, and the sheet at which I looked longest was filled with allusions strange to me. My eyes caught words like *Ithaqua, Lloigor, Hastur;* it was not until I had handed the sheets back to my uncle that it occurred to me that I had seen those words elsewhere, not too long ago. But I said nothing. I explained that I could not help feeling that Uncle Leander wrote with needless obfuscation.

Grandfather chuckled. "I should have thought that the first thing which would have occurred to you would have been similar to my own reaction, but no, you failed me! Surely it's obvious that the whole business is in a code!"

"Of course! That would explain the awkwardness of his lines."

My grandfather smirked. "A fairly simple code, but adequate—entirely adequate. I have not yet finished with it." He tapped the envelope with one index finger. "It seems to concern this house, and there is in it a repeated warning that one must be careful, and not pass beyond the threshold, for fear of dire consequences. My boy, I've crossed and recrossed every threshold in his house scores of times, and there have been no consequences. So therefore, somewhere there must exist a threshold I have not yet crossed."

I could not help smiling at his animation. "If Uncle Leander's mind was wandering, you've been off on a pretty chase," I said.

Abruptly grandfather's well-known impatience boiled to the surface. With one hand he swept my uncle's papers away; with the other he dismissed us both, and it

was plain to see that Frolin and I had on the instant ceased to exist for him.

We rose, made our excuses, and left the room.

In the half-dark of the hall beyond, Frolin looked at me, saying nothing, only permitting his hot eyes to dwell upon mine for a long minute before he turned and led the way upstairs, where we parted, each to go to his own room for the night.

II

THE nocturnal activity of the subconscious mind has always been of deep interest to me, since it has seemed to me that unlimited opportunities are opened up before every alert individual. I have repeatedly gone to bed with some problem vexing me, only to find it solved insofar as I am capable of solving it, upon waking. Of those other, more devious activities of the night mind, I have less knowledge. I know that I retired that night with the question of where I had encountered my Uncle Leander's strange words before strong and foremost in mind, and I know that I went to sleep at last with that question unanswered.

Yet, when I awoke in the darkness some hours later, I knew at once that I had seen those words, those strange proper names in the book by H. P. Lovecraft which I had read at Miskatonic, and it was only secondarily that I was aware of someone tapping at my door, and called out in a hushed voice.

"It's Frolin. Are you awake? I'm coming in."

I got up, slipped on my dressing gown, and lit my electric candle. By this time Frolin was in the room, his thin body trembling a little, possibly from the cold, for the September night air flowing in through my window was no longer of summer.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He came over to me, a strange light in his eyes, and put a hand on my arm. "Can't you hear it?" he asked. "God, perhaps it *is* my mind."

"No, wait!" I exclaimed.

From somewhere outside, it seemed, came the sound of weirdly beautiful music: flutes, I thought.

"Grandfather's at the radio," I said. "Does he often listen so late?"

The expression on his face halted my words.

"I own the only radio in the house. It's in my room, and it's not playing. The battery's run down, in any case. Besides, did you ever hear *such* music on the radio?"

I listened with renewed interest. The music seemed strangely muffled, and yet it came through. I observed also that it had no definite direction; while before it had seemed to come from outside, it now seemed to come from underneath the house —a curious, chant-like playing of reeds and pipes.

"A flute orchestra," I said.

"Or Pan pipes," said Frolin.

"They don't play them any more," I said absently.

"Not on the radio," answered Frolin.

I looked at him sharply; he returned my gaze as steadily. It occurred to me that his unnatural gravity had a reason for being, whether or not he wished to put that reason into words. I caught hold of his arms.

"Frolin—what is it? I can tell you're alarmed."

He swallowed hard. "Tony, that music doesn't come from anything in the house. It's from outside."

"But who would be outside?" I demanded.

"Nothing—no one human."

It had come at last. Almost with relief I faced this issue I had been afraid to admit to myself must be faced. *Nothing—no one human.*

"Then—what agency?" I asked.

"I think grandfather knows," he said.

"Come with me, Tony. Leave the light; we can make our way in the dark."

Out in the hall, I was stopped once more by his hand tense on my arm. "Do you notice?" he whispered sibilantly. "Do you notice this, too?"

"The smell," I said. The vague, elusive smell of water, of fish and frogs and the inhabitants of watery places.

"And now!" he said.

Quite suddenly the smell of water was gone, and instead came a swift frostiness, flowing through the hall as of something alive, the indefinable fragrance of snow, the crisp moistness of snowy air.

"Do you wonder I've been concerned?" asked Frolin.

Giving me no time to reply, he led the way downstairs to the door of grandfather's study, beneath which there shone yet a fine line of yellow light. I was conscious in every step of our descent to the floor below that the music was growing louder, if no more understandable, and now, before the study door, it was apparent that the music emanated from within, and that the strange variety of odors came, too, from that study. The darkness seemed alive with menace, charged with an impending, ominous terror, which enclosed us as in a shell, so that Frolin trembled at my side.

IMPULSIVELY I raised my arm and knocked on the door.

There was no answer from within, but on the instant of my knock, the music stopped, the strange odors vanished from the air!

"You shouldn't have done that!" whispered Frolin. "If he . . ."

I tried the door. It yielded to my pressure, and I opened it.

I do not know what I expected to see there in the study, but certainly not what I did see. No single aspect of the room had changed, save that grandfather had gone to bed, and now sat there with his eyes closed and a little smile on his lips, some of his work open before him on the bed, and the lamp burning. I stood for an instant staring, not daring to believe my eyes, incredible before the prosaic scene I looked upon. Whence then had come the music I had heard? And the odors and fragrances in the air? Confusion took possession of my thoughts, and I was about to withdraw, disturbed by the repose of my grandfather's features, when he spoke.

"Come in, then," he said, without opening his eyes. "So you heard the music, too? I had begun to wonder why no one else heard it. Mongolian, I think. Three nights ago, it was clearly Indian—north country again, Canada and Alaska. I believe there are places where Ithaqua is still worshipped. Yes, yes—and a week ago, notes I last heard played in Tibet, in forbidden Lhassa years ago, decades ago."

"Who made it?" I cried. "Where did it come from?"

He opened his eyes and regarded us standing there. "It came from here, I think," he said, placing the flat of one hand on the manuscript before him, the sheets written by my great-uncle. "And Leander's friends made it. Music of the spheres, my boy—do you credit your senses?"

"I heard it," I said. "So did Frolin."

"And what can Hough be thinking?" mused grandfather. He sighed. "I have nearly got it, I think. It only remains to determine with which of them Leander communicated."

"Which?" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

He closed his eyes and the smile came briefly back to his lips. "I thought at first it was Cthulhu; Leander was, after all, a sea-faring man. But now—I wonder if it might not be one of the creatures of air: Lloigor, perhaps—or Ithaqua, whom I believe certain of the Indians call the Wendigo. There is a legend that Ithaqua carries his victims with him in the far spaces

above the earth—but I am forgetting myself again, my mind wanders." His eyes flashed open, and I found him regarding us with a peculiarly aloof stare. "It's late," he said. "I need sleep."

"What in God's name was he talking about?" asked Frolin, in the hall.

"Come along," I said.

BUT, back in my room once more, with Frolin waiting expectantly to hear what I had to say, I did not know how to begin. How could I tell him about the weird knowledge hidden in the forbidden texts at Miskatonic University—the dread *Book of Eibon,* the obscure *Pnakotic Manuscripts,* the terrible *R'lyeh Text,* and, most shunned of all, the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Alhazred? How could I say to him with any conviction at all the things that crowded into my mind as a result of hearing my grandfather's strange words, the memories that boiled up from deep within—of powerful Ancient Ones, elder beings of unbelievable evil, old gods who once inhabited the earth and all the universe as we know it now, and perhaps far more—old gods of ancient good, and forces of ancient evil, of whom the latter were now in leash, and yet ever breaking forth, becoming manifest briefly, horribly to the world of men. And their terrible names came back now, if before this hour my clue to remembrance had not been made strong enough, had been refused in the fastnesses of my inherent prejudices—Cthulhu, potent leader of the forces of the waters of earth; Yog-Sothoth and Tsathoggua, dwellers in the depths of earth; Lloigor, Hastur, and Ithaqua, the Snow-Thing, the Wind-Walker, who were the elementals of air. It was of these beings that grandfather had spoken; and the inference he had made was too plain to be disregarded, or even to be subject to any other interpretation—that my great-uncle Leander, whose home, after all, had once been in the shunned and now deserted city of Innsmouth, had had traffic with at least one of these beings. And there was a further inference that he had not made, but only hinted at in something he had said earlier in the evening—that there was somewhere in the house a threshold, beyond which a man dared not walk, and what danger could lurk beyond that threshold but the path back into time, the way back to that hideous communication with the elder beings my Uncle Leander had had!

And yet somehow, the full import of grandfather's words had not dawned upon me. Though he had said so much, there was far more he had left unsaid, and I could not blame myself later for not fully realizing that grandfather's activities were clearly bent toward discovering that hidden threshold of which Uncle Leander had so cryptically written—*and crossing it!* In the confusion of thought to which I had now come in my preoccupation with the ancient mythology of Cthulhu, Ithaqua and the elder gods, I did not follow the obvious indications to that logical conclusion, possibly because I feared instinctively to go so far.

I turned to Frolin and explained to him as clearly as I could. He listened attentively, asking a few pointed questions from time to time, and, though he paled slightly at certain details I could not refrain from mentioning, he did not seem to be as incredulous as I might have thought. This in itself was evidence of the fact that there was still more to be discovered about my grandfather's activities and the occurrences in the house, though I did not immediately realize this. However, I was shortly to discover more of the underlying reason for Frolin's ready acceptance of my necessarily sketchy outline.

In the middle of a question, he ceased talking abruptly, and there came into his eyes an expression indicating that his attention had passed from me, from the room

to somewhere byond; he sat in an attitude of listening, and, impelled by his own actions, I, too, strained to hear what he heard.

Only the wind's voice in the trees, rising now a little, I thought. A storm coming.

"Do you hear it?" he said in a shaky whisper.

"No," I said quietly. "Only the wind."

"Yes, yes—the wind. I wrote you, remember. Listen."

"Now, come, Frolin, take hold of yourself. It's only the wind."

He gave me a pitying glance, and, going to the window, beckoned me after him. I followed, coming to his side. Without a word, he pointed into the darkness pressing close to the house. It took me a moment to accustom myself to the night, but presently I was able to see the line of trees struck sharply against the starswept heavens. And then, instantly, I understood.

THOUGH the sound of the wind roared and thundered about the house, nothing whatever disturbed the trees before my eyes—not a twig, not a leaf, not a treetop swayed by so much as a hair's-breadth!

"Good God!" I exclaimed, and fell back, away from the pane, as if to shut the sight from my eyes.

"Now, you see," he said, stepping back from the window, also. "I have heard all this before."

He stood quietly, as if waiting, and I, too, waited. The sound of the wind continued unabated; it had by this time reached a frightful intensity, so that it seemed as if the old house must be torn from the hillside and hurtled into the valley below. Indeed, a faint trembling made itself manifest even as I thought this: a strange tremor, as if the house were *shuddering*, and the pictures on the walls made a slight, almost *stealthy* movement, almost imperceptible, and yet quite unmistakably visible. I glanced at Frolin, but his features were not disquieted; he continued to stand, listening and waiting, so that it was patent that the end of this singular manifestation was not yet. The wind's sound was now a terrible, demoniac howling, and it was accompanied by notes of music, which must have been audible for some time, but were so perfectly blended with the wind's voice that I was not at first aware of them. The music was similar to that which had gone before, as of pipes and occasionally stringed instruments, but was now much wilder, sounding with a terrifying abandon, with a character of unmentionable evil about it. At the same time, two further manifestations occurred. The first was the sound as of someone walking, some great being whose footsteps seemed to flow into the room from the heart of the wind itself; certainly they did not originate in the house, though there was about them the unmistakable swelling which betokened their approach to the house. The second was the sudden change in the temperature.

The night outside was warm for September in upstate Wisconsin, and the house too, had been reasonably comfortable. Now, abruptly, coincident with the approaching footsteps, the temperature began to drop rapidly, so that in a little while the air in the room was cold, and both Frolin and I had to put on more clothing in order to keep comfortable. Still this did not seem to be the height of the manifestations for which Frolin so obviously waited; he continued to stand, saying nothing, though his eyes, meeting mine from time to time, were eloquent enough to speak his mind. How long we stood there, listening to those frightening sounds from outside, before the end came, I do not know.

But suddenly Frolin caught my arm, and in a hoarse whisper, cried, "There! There they are! Listen!"

The tempo of the weird music had changed abruptly to diminuendo from its

previous wild crescendo; there came into it now a strain of almost unbearable sweetness, with a little of melancholy to it, music as lovely as previously it had been evil, and yet the note of terror was not completely absent. At the same time, there was apparent the sound of voices, raised in a kind of swelling chant, rising from the back of the house somewhere—as if from the study.

"Great God in Heaven!" I cried, seizing Frolin. "What is it now?"

"It's grandfather's doing," he said. "Whether he knows it or not, that thing comes and sings to him." He shook his head and closed his eyes tightly for an instant before saying bitterly in a low, intense voice, "If only that accursed paper of Leander's had been burned as it ought to have been!"

"You could almost make out the words," I said, listening intently.

THERE were words—but not words I had ever heard before: a kind of horrible, primeval mouthing, as if some bestial creature with but half a tongue ululated syllables of meaningless horror. I went over and opened the door; immediately the voices seemed clearer, so that it was evident that what I had mistaken for many voices was but one, which could nevertheless convey the illusion of many. Words—or perhaps I had better write *sounds*, bestial sounds—rose from below, a kind of awe-inspiring ululation:

"Iä! Iä! Ithaqua! Ithaqua cf'ayak vulgtmm Iä! Ugh! Cthulhu fhtagn! Shub-Niggurath! Ithaqua naflfhtagn!"

Incredibly, the wind's voice rose to howl even more terribly, so that I thought at any moment the house would be hurled into the void, and Frolin and myself torn from its rooms, and the breath sucked from our helpless bodies. In the confusion of fear and wonder that held me, I thought at that instant of grandfather in the study below and, beckoning Frolin, I ran from the room to the stairs, determined, despite my ghastly fright, to put myself between the old man and whatever menaced him. I ran to his door and flung myself upon it—and once more, as before, all manifestations stopped; as if by the flick of a switch, silence fell like a pall of darkness upon the house, a silence that was momentarily even more terrible.

The door gave, and once more I faced grandfather.

He was sitting still as we had left him but a short time before, though now his eyes were open, his head was cocked a little to one side, and his gaze was fixed upon the overlarge painting on the east wall.

"In God's name!" I cried. "What was that?"

"I hope to find out before long," he answered with great dignity and gravity.

His utter lack of fear quieted my own alarm to some degree, and I came a little further into the room, Frolin following. I leaned over his bed, striving to fix his attention upon me, but he continued to gaze at the painting with singular intensity.

"What are you doing?" I demanded. "Whatever it is, there's danger in it."

"An explorer like your grandfather would hardly be content if there were not, my boy," he replied crisply, matter-of-factly.

I knew it was true.

"I would rather die with my boots on than here in this bed," he went on. "As for what we heard—I don't know how much of it you heard—that's something for the moment not yet explicable. But I would call to your attention the strange action of the wind."

"There was no wind," I said. "I looked.

"Yes, yes," he said a little impatiently. "True enough. And yet the wind's sound was there, and all the voices of the wind—just as I have heard it singing in Mongolia, in the great snowy spaces, over the shunned

and hidden Plateau of Leng where the Tcho-Tcho people worship strange ancient gods." He turned to face me suddenly, and I thought his eyes feverish. "I did tell you, didn't I, about the worship of Ithaqua, sometimes called Wind-Walker, and by some, surely, the Wendigo, by certain Indians in upper Manitoba, and of their beliefs that the Wind-Walker takes human sacrifices and carries them over the far places of the earth before leaving them behind, dead at last? Oh, there are stories, my boy, odd legends—and something more." He leaned toward me now with a fierce intensity. "I have myself seen things —things found on a body dropped from the air—just that—things that could not possibly have been got in Manitoba, things belonging to Leng, to the Pacific Isles." He brushed me away with one arm, and an expression of disgust crossed his face. "You don't believe me. You think I'm wandering. Go on then, go back to your little sleep, and wait for your last through the eternal misery of monotonous day after day!"

"No! Say it now," I said. "I'm in no mood to go."

"I will talk to you in the morning," he said tiredly, leaning back.

With that I had to be content; he was adamant, and could not be moved. I bade him goodnight once more and retreated into the hall with Frolin, who stood there shaking his head slowly, forbiddingly.

"Every time a little worse," he whispered. "Every time the wind blows a little louder, the cold comes more intensely, the voices and the music more clearly—and the sound of those terrible footsteps!"

He turned away and began to retrace the way upstairs, and, after a moment of hesitation, I followed.

IN THE morning my grandfather looked his usual picture of good health. At the moment of my entrance into the dining-room, he was speaking to Hough, evidently in answer to a request, for the old servant stood respectfully bowed, while he heard grandfather tell him that he and Mrs. Hough might indeed take a week off, beginning today, if it was necessary for Mrs. Hough's health that she go to Wausau to consult a specialist. Frolin met my eyes with a grim smile; his color had faded a little, leaving him pale and sleepless-looking, but he ate heartily enough. His smile, and the brief indicative glance of his eyes toward Hough's retreating back, said clearly that this necessity which had come upon Hough and his wife was their way of fighting the manifestations which had so disturbed my own first night in the house.

"Well, my boy," said grandfather quite cheerfully, "you're not looking nearly as haggard as you did last night. I confess, I felt for you. I daresay also you aren't nearly so skeptical as you were."

He chuckled, as if this were a subject for joking. I could not, unfortunately, feel the same way about it. I sat down and began to eat a little, glancing at him from time to time, waiting for him to begin his explanation of the strange events of the previous night.

Since it became evident shortly that he did not intend to explain, I was impelled to ask for an explanation, and did so with as much dignity as possible.

"I'm sorry," he said, "if you've been disturbed. The fact of the matter is that that threshold of which Leander wrote must be in that study somewhere, and I felt quite certain I was onto it last night, before you burst into my room the second time. Furthermore, it seems undisputable that at least one member of the family has had traffic with one of those beings—Leander, obviously."

Frolin leaned forward. "Do you believe in them?" he asked.

Grandfather smiled unpleasantly. "It must be obvious that, whatever my abilities,

the disturbance you heard last night could hardly have been caused by me."

"Yes, of course," agreed Frolin. "But some other agency."

"No, no—it remains to be determined only which one. The water smells are the sign of the spawn of Cthulhu, but the winds might be Lloigor or Ithaqua or Hastur. But the stars aren't right for Hastur," he went on. "So we are left with the other two. There they are, then, or one of them, just across that threshold. I want to know what lies beyond that threshold, if I can find it."

It seemed incredible that my grandfather should be talking so unconcernedly about these ancient beings; his prosaic air was in itself almost as alarming as had been the night's occurrences. The temporary feeling of security I had had at the sight of him eating breakfast was washed away; I began to be conscious again of that slowly growing fear I had known on my way to the house last evening, and I regretted having pushed my inquiry.

If grandfather was aware of anything of this, he made no sign. He went on talking much in the manner of a lecturer pursuing a scientific inquiry for the benefit of an audience before him. It was obvious, he said, that a connection existed between the happenings at Innsmouth and Leander Alwyn's nonhuman contact *outside*. Did Leander leave Innsmouth originally because of the cult of Cthulhu that existed there, because he, too, was becoming afflicted with that curious facial change which overtook so many of the inhabitants of accursed Innsmouth?—those strange batrachian lineaments which horrified the Federal investigators who came to examine into the Innsmouth affair? Perhaps this was so. In any event, leaving the Cthulhu cult behind, he had made his way into the wilds of Wisconsin and somehow he had established contact with another of the elder beings, Lloigor or Ithaqua—all, to be noted, elemental forces of evil. Leander Alwyn was apparently a very wicked man.

"If there is any truth to this," I cried, "then surely Leander's warning ought to be observed. Give up this mad hope of finding the threshold of which he writes!"

Grandfather gazed at me for a moment with speculative mildness; but it was plain to see that he was not actually concerning himself with my outburst. "Now I've embarked upon this exploration, I mean to keep to it. After all, Leander died a natural death."

"But, following your own theory, he had traffic with these—these things," I said. "You have none. You're daring to venture out into unknown space—it comes to that—without regard for what horrors might lie there."

"When I went into Mongolia, I encountered horrors, too. I never thought to escape Leng with my life." He paused reflectively, and then rose slowly. "No, I mean to discover Leander's threshold. And tonight, no matter what you hear, try not to interrupt me. It would be a pity, if after so long a time, I am still further delayed by your impetuosity."

"And, having discovered the threshold," I cried. "What then?"

"I'm not sure I'll want to cross it."

"The choice may not be yours," I said.

He looked at me for a moment in silence, smiled gently, and left the room.

III

OF THE events of that catastrophic night, I find it difficult even at this late date to write, so vividly do they return to mind, despite the prosaic surroundings of Miskatonic University where so many of those dread secrets are hidden in ancient and little-known texts. And yet, to understand the widespread occurrences that came after, the events of that night must be known.

Frolin and I spent most of the day investigating my grandfather's books and papers, in search of verification of certain legends he had hinted at in his conversation, not only with me, but with Frolin even before my arrival. Throughout his work occurred many cryptic allusions, but only one narrative at all relative to our inquiry—a somewhat obscure story, clearly of legendary origin, concerning the disappearance of two residents of Nelson, Manitoba, and a constable of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and their subsequent reappearance, as if dropped from the heavens, frozen and either dead or dying, babbling of *Ithaqua,* of the *Wind-Walker,* and of many places on the face of the earth, and carrying with them strange objects, mementoes of far places, which they had never been known to carry in life. The story was incredible, and yet it was related to the mythology so clearly put down in *The Outsider and Others,* and even more horribly narrated in the *Pnakotic Manuscripts,* the *R'lyeh Text,* and the terrible *Necronomicon.*

APART from this, we found nothing tangible enough to relate to our problem, and we resigned ourselves to waiting for the night.

At luncheon and dinner, prepared by Frolin in the absence of the Houghs, my grandfather carried on as normally he was accustomed to, making no reference to his strange exploration, beyond saying that he had now definite proof that Leander had painted that unattractive landscape on the east wall of the study, and that he hoped soon, as he neared the end of the deciphering of Leander's long, rambling letter, to find the essential clue to that threshold of which he wrote, and to which he alluded increasingly now. When he rose from the dinner table, he solemnly cautioned us once more not to interrupt him in the night, under pain of his extreme displeasure, and so departed into that study out of which he never walked again.

"Do you think you can sleep?" Frolin asked me, when we were alone.

I shook my head. "Impossible. I'll stay up."

"I don't think he'd like us to stay downstairs," said Frolin, a faint frown on his forehead.

"In my room, then," I replied. "And you?"

"With you, if you don't mind. He means to see it through, and there's nothing we can do until he needs us. He may call . . ."

I had the uncomfortable conviction that if my grandfather called for us, it would be too late, but I forebore to give voice to my fears.

The events of that evening started as before—with the strains of that weirdly beautiful music welling flute-like from the darkness around the house. Then, in a little while, came the wind, and the cold, and the ululating voice. And then, preceded by an aura of evil so great that it was almost stifling in the room—then came something more, something unspeakably terrible. We had been sitting, Frolin and I, with the light out; I had not bothered to light my electric candle, since no light we could show would illumine the source of these manifestations. I faced the window and, when the wind began to rise, looked once again to the line of trees, thinking that surely, certainly, they must bend before this great onrushing storm of wind; but again there was nothing, no movement in that stillness.

And there was no cloud in the heavens; the stars shone brightly, the constellations of summer moving down to the western rim of earth to make the signature of autumn in the sky. The wind's sound had risen steadily, so that now it had the fury of a gale, and yet nothing, no movement disturbed the line of trees dark upon the night sky.

BUT suddenly—so suddenly that for a moment I blinked my eyes in an effort to convince myself that a dream had shuttered my sight—in one large area of the sky the stars were gone! I came to my feet and pressed my face to the pane. It was as if a cloud had abruptly reared up into the heavens, to a height almost at the zenith; but no cloud could have come upon the sky so swiftly. On both sides and overhead stars still shone. I opened the window and leaned out, trying to follow the dark outline against the stars. *It was the outline of some great beast, a horrible caricature of man, rising to a semblance of a head high in the heavens, and there, where its eyes might have been, glowed with a deep carmine fire two stars!*—Or were they stars?

At the same instant, the sound of those approaching footsteps grew so loud that the house shook and trembled with their vibrations, and the wind's demoniac fury rose to indescribable heights, and the ululation reached such a pitch that it was maddening to hear.

"Frolin!" I called hoarsely.

I felt him come to my side, and in a moment felt his tight grasp on my arm. So he, too, had seen: it was not hallucination, not dream—this giant thing outlined against the stars, and moving!

"It's moving," whispered Frolin. "Oh, God—it's coming!"

He pulled frantically away from the window, and so did I. But in an instant, the shadow on the sky was gone, the stars shone once more. The wind, however, had not decreased in intensity one iota; indeed, if it were possible, it grew momentarily wilder and more violent; the entire house shuddered and quaked, while those thunderous footsteps echoed and re-echoed in the valley before the house. And the cold grew worse, so that breath hung a white vapor in air—a cold as of outer space.

Out of all the turmoil of mind, I thought of the legend in my grandfather's papers—the legend of *Ithaqua*, whose signature lay in the cold and snow of far northern places. Even as I remembered, everything was driven from my mind by a frightful chorus of ululation, the triumphant chanting as of a thousand bestial mouths—

"Iä! Iä! Ithaqua, Ithaqua! Ai! Ai! Ai! Ithaqua cf'ayak vulgtmm vulgtlagln vulgtmm, Ithaqua fhatagn! Ugh! Iä! Iä! Ai! Ai! Ai!"

Simultaneously came a thunderous crash, and immediately after, the voice of my grandfather, raised in a terrible cry, a cry that rose into a scream of mortal terror, so that the names he would have uttered—Frolin's and mine—were lost, choked back into his throat by the full force of the horror revealed to him.

And, as abruptly as his voice ceased to sound, all other manifestations came to a stop, leaving again that ghastly, portentous silence to close around us like a cloud of doom.

Frolin reached the door of my room before I did, but I was not far behind. He fell part of the way down the stairs, but recovered in the light of my electric candle, which I had seized on my way out, and together we assaulted the door of the study, calling to the old man inside.

But no voice answered, though the line of yellow under the door was evidence that his lamp burned still.

The door had been locked from the inside, so that it was necessary to break it down before we could enter.

Of my grandfather, there was no trace. But in the east wall yawned a great cavity, where the painting, now prone upon the floor, had been—a rocky opening leading into the depths of earth—and over everything in the room lay the mark of Ithaqua—a fine carpet of snow, whose crystals gleamed as from a million tiny jewels in the yellow light of grandfather's lamp. Save for the painting, only the bed was dis-

turbed—*as if grandfather had been literally torn out of it by stupendous force!*

I looked hurriedly to where the old man had kept Uncle Leander's manuscript—but it was gone; nothing of it remained. Frolin cried out suddenly and pointed to the painting Uncle Leander had made, and then to the opening yawning before us.

"It was here all the time—the threshold," he said.

And I saw even as he; as grandfather had seen too late—*for the painting by Uncle Leander was but the representation of the site of his home before the house had been erected to conceal that cavernous opening into the earth on the hillside, the hidden threshold against which Leander's manuscript had warned, the threshold beyond which my grandfather had vanished!*

THOUGH there is little more to tell, yet the most damning of all the curious facts remain to be revealed. A thorough search of the cavern was subsequently made by county officials and certain intrepid adventurers from Harmon; it was found to have several openings, and it was plain that anyone or *anything* wishing to reach the house through the cavern would have had to enter through one of the innumerable hidden crevices discovered among the surrounding hills. The nature of Uncle Leander's activities were revealed after grandfather's disappearance. Frolin and I were put through a hard grilling by suspicious county officials, but were finally released when the body of my grandfather did not come to light.

But since that night, certain facts came into the open, facts which, in the light of my grandfather's hints, coupled with the horrible legends contained in the shunned books locked away here in the library of Miskatonic University, are damning and damnably inescapable.

The first of them was the series of gigantic footprints found in the earth at that place where on that fatal night the shadow had risen into the starswept heavens—the unbelievably wide and deep depressions, as of some prehistoric monster walking there, steps a half mile apart, steps that led beyond the house and vanished at a crevice leading down into that hidden cavern in tracks identical with those found in the snow in northern Manitoba where those unfortunate travelers and the constable sent to find them had vanished from the face of the earth!

The second was the discovery of my grandfather's notebook, together with a portion of Uncle Leander's manuscript, encased in ice, found deep in the forest snows of upper Saskatchewan, and bearing every sign of having been dropped from a great height. The last entry was dated on the day of his disappearance in late September; the notebook was not found until the following April. Neither Frolin nor I dared to make the explanation of its strange appearance which came immediately to mind, and together we burned that horrible letter and the imperfect translation grandfather had made, the translation which in itself, as it was written down, with all its warnings against the terror beyond the threshold, had served to summon from *outside* a creature so horrible that its description has never been attempted by even those ancient writers whose terrible narratives are scattered over the face of the earth!

And last of all, the most conclusive, the most damning evidence—the discovery seven months later of my grandfather's body on a small Pacific island not far southeast of Singapore, and the curious report made of his condition: perfectly preserved, *as if in ice,* so cold that no one could touch him with bare hands for five days after his discovery, and the singular fact that he was found half buried in sand, *as if "he had fallen from an aeroplane!"* Neither Frolin nor I could any longer have any

doubt; this was the legend of Ithaqua, who carried his victims with him into far places of the earth, in time and space, before leaving them behind. And the evidence was undeniable that my grandfather had been alive for part of that incredible journey, for if we had had any doubt, the things found in his pockets, the mementoes carried from strange hidden places where he had been, and sent to us, were final and damning testimony—the gold placque, with its minature presentation of a struggle between ancient beings, and bearing on its surface inscriptions in cabalistic designs, the placque which Dr. Rackham of Miskatonic University identified as having come from some place beyond the memory of man; the loathsome book in Durmese that reveals ghastly legends of that shunned and hidden Plateau of Leng, the place of the dread Tcho-Tcho people; and finally, *the revolting and bestial stone miniature of a hellish monstrosity walking on the winds above the earth!*

FROM THE WITCH'S TALE—the highly popular, ultra-chivery broadcast which chilled radio listeners from coast to coast—to WEIRD TALES, *the Unique Magazine* . . . comes a story specially adapted for our pages by that famous program's author and director, *Alonzo Dean Cole.* It's in your next issue. This story, a prime favorite with the radio audience, is titled—

THE SPIRITS OF THE LAKE

—you may remember it. Set against the background of a sultry Indian Summer—the Moon of Falling Leaves, of dying things—is the drama of two ruthless murderers who defy the terrible Nesbanawbaigs . . . ancient Indian gods of the Holy lake. Was it at the bidding of these Old Ones that slime—loathsome, hideously green—rose from the lake's dreadful depths to exact monstrous vengeance . . . ?

"TUNE IN" ON YOUR NOVEMBER ISSUE—OUT SEPTEMBER 1st!

Where Are You, Mr. Biggs?

By NELSON S. BOND

That gangling frame, that easy, fluent grin—lost in the nameless depths of the crypts of space!

WE'RE supposed to be an Earth-Mars lugger, but when we got to Mars Central spaceport, the bug-pounder there gave me this solargram from Terra. It said:

"PROCEED URANUS IMMEDIATELY PICK UP CARGO GALLIUM."

So I shoved a frantic for the Old Man over the ship audio, and pretty soon he came lumbering up to my radio room, picking his teeth and scowling like a man with only a half a tummyfull of victuals.

"It's a fine state of affairs," he snarled, "when a skipper can't even finish his dinner in peace! Well, what's the matter now,

Sparks? You seeing pink rhinoceroses again? 'Cause if you are—"

"I'm not," I told him with quiet dignity, "and they aren't pink rhinos, they're lavender lobsters, and anyway, I haven't had a drink for months. Or maybe it's since yesterday? Anyhow, here's the grief." And I gave him the wire.

He read it. Read it, your Aunt Nelly—he screamed it out loud.

"Uranus!" he bellowed. *"This* crate make *that* trip? They must be stark, staring mad!"

"Them," I agreed, "or me. Flip a coin. What shall I do, Skipper? Tell 'em we can't do it? Tell 'em—?"

"No, wait a minute." Cap Hanson's brow looked like a freshly ploughed field. I knew why. The *Saturn* is an old lugger. And by old, I *do* mean ancient. It was built before the turn of the century, and by all laws of logic and reason should have been taken off the spaceways long ago, only that Cap Hanson and our screwball First Mate, Lancelot Biggs, had demonstrated time and time again, and in startlingly devious ways, that the old scow was still spaceworthy.

But if the *Saturn* were removed from active service, the chances were ten to one that Hanson would be junked with her. Which was Reason Numero Uno—and a damned good one — why the skipper couldn't risk refusing this order.

"We'll go, Sparks," he said slowly. "We've got to. But I could wring his scrawny neck, blast his jets!"

I didn't have to ask whom he meant. "Scrawny neck" would mean only one inmate of our void-perambulating asylum. Lancelot Biggs. Genius and crackpot, scarecrow and sage—and soon to become son-in-law of the skipper.

I said, "But why blame Biggs for this, Skipper? Is it his fault if the Home Office has gone squirrelly?"

"It is," grumbled Hanson savagely. "I never should have agreed to let Diane marry him. He started this mess at my house. Colonel Brophy and him was having dinner with me and Biggs told Brophy all about that new 'velocity intensifier' he invented—"

I shuddered. "You mean the gadget which got us all bolixed up in the negative universe? Till Hank Cleaver came from the past to get us out?"

"That's it. Well, he told Brophy about it, bragged that it would make the *Saturn* the fastest ship in the ether. And now," Hanson groaned, "just because he shot off his big face, we've got to push this leaky old tin-can to Uranus!"

I said consolingly, "Well, maybe everything will be all right, Skipper. I admit Mr. Biggs is a bit of a whacky-pot, but he's pulled us out of plenty of tough spots before. Like the time he thwarted Red Hake and his pirate crew. And the time he beat the *Slipstream*—"

Hanson stared at me somberly.

"Nope, I guess you ain't. You couldn't have."

I said, "Which? Couldn't have what, sir?"

"You mustn't have seen Mr. Biggs on this shuttle."

It was the first time I had realized it, but he was right! And that was funny, because Mr. Biggs and I were old buddies. We were bunkmates once, even. I said, "Well, lift my gravs! Come to think of it, I haven't? Why, Skipper? I guess maybe it's on account of he's busy planning to get married so soon?"

Hanson made sounds like a man being garrotted.

"Marriage! Don't talk to me about marriage! Bert, what does marriage do to a man?"

"Marriage," I replied promptly, "makes the mare go. Or, no—that's money, isn't it? I give up, sir. What?"

"It's supposed," boiled Hanson, "to

make him settle down. Only it ain't. Not in Biggs' case. It's having just the opposite effect. Making him flighty as a coot. Lancelot ain't been worth a tinker's dam on this trip. He can't do a single thing right! Remember our take-off, Sparks? From Long Island port? The one where we—"

"—lifted gravs two full minutes before schedule?" I finished. "Don't I just! I almost did a swan dive through the aft bulkhead. Why? Did he—?"

"Mmm-hmm! And he also plotted the course that took us nine degrees off trajectory. *And* he heaved the ship into a Van-Maeden spiral by signaling for a double-jet port blast in midspace. *And* he—" Hanson paused, panting with wrath. "But why go on? The point is, the very thought of marriage has ruined him. And we can't depend on him to help us with this assignment. And Uranus is a long way from here. A *lo-o-oong* way!"

I winced. I said, "Look, Skipper—must you say it thataway? With icicles in your voice, I mean?"

BUT orders is orders. We lifted gravs as commanded at 11.20 Martian Constant Time—that's 3-X-9 Solar Relative—and pointed our prow toward the spot in space where, some billion and a half odd miles away, Uranus was lounging about a wan and distant Sun like a gigantic snowball. That is, we attempted to point our prow in that direction. Cap Hanson's astrogation came a cropper on this problem. He called me to the control turret. He asked, "Sparks, have you seen him?"

"You mean Mr. Biggs? No, sir."

"Well, go find him. In the first place, none of us except him know how to chart to intersect Uranus' orbit, and in the second place, we don't know how to operate that crazy velocity intensifier of his'n, and—" Fretfully. "—and in the third place, I don't like this in the first place!"

So I made a tour of the ship, and found him where I should have looked first. In his own cabin, raptly fondling a cabinet photograph of Diane Hanson—soon-to-be Biggs. He glanced up as I entered, and his phenomenal Adam's apple, an auricular escalator if I ever saw one, bobbed in greeting.

"Hello, Sparks," he said dreamily, and held out the picture for my inspection. "She's lovely, isn't she?"

I said, "Don't look now, Mr. Biggs, but that cheery little noise you've been ignoring is the audio buzzer beside your elbow. It's for you. The skipper wants you topside."

Biggs looked startled.

"Me? But there must be some mistake. I'm off duty until tomorrow morning."

"Guess again," I told him. "It so happens that you are the only mugg—I mean officer—around here who knows how to finagle that velocity intensifier of yours. So you're elected. After all, if we're going to Uranus—"

That got him. He popped off his hip pockets like a thunderbolt from the blooie!

"What! Uranus!"

"Okay," I said gloomily. "And you watch yours." I stared at him curiously, though. "What's the matter; didn't you know?"

"Know! Of course not! B-but—" His fluid larynx did handsprings. "But I can't go to Uranus! I told her I'd be home in ten days!"

I said, "Then she'd better not hold her breath till you get there. You led with your chin, Lieutenant, when you told the president of our beloved corporation about your new invention. He'd decided to give it a work-out. And as near as I can figure—" This was what had been worrying me from the start. "It will take us about ten months to get to Uranus, and another twelve to get back!"

But, surprisingly, it was my dejection

that snapped Biggs out of his. The impatient-bridegroom-look disappeared from his eyes, and he grinned.

"My goodness, no, Sparks! Don't you understand the operation of my velocity intensifier?"

"I'm a bug-pounder," I told him. "I understand the space code, and dots and dashes, and Ampies, and I know four languages. That's par for the course."

"It's really quite simple. My velocity intensifier is exactly what the name implies—a device that is attached to the hypatomic motors for the purpose of "stepping up" our normal velocity. It's based on the principle of energy-conservation. A series of parallax-condensers absorb all waste energy, pass it through multiple amplifiers, rotors and—"

"—and all points west!" I finished. "It's no go, Lieutenant. That's one of the languages I don't talk. Give it to me in words of one syllable. How long will it take us to get to Uranus and back?"

"Considering the mean distance of Uranus," answered Biggs quietly, "as approximately 1,560,000,000 miles, and if we traveled at our hitherto 'normal' rate of speed, 200,000 m.p.h., it should take us 7,800 hours, or 325 days, to reach there. And slightly longer to return to Earth."

"Ten months!" I wailed. "I knew it!"

"But," continued Biggs proudly, "with this velocity intensifier attachment, our potential speed is restrained by only one factor. The limiting velocity of light, or 186,000 miles per second!

"In other words, the *Saturn* is now capable of a top speed of more than 650,000,000 miles per hour!"

I gasped. I said, "Huh? You mean," I said, "the trip to Uranus will take only a little more than two hours?"

Biggs smiled complacently.

"Theoretically, yes; actually it will take somewhat longer. You see, we must allow time for acceleration, for a condensation-charge to build up in our super-chargers before setting the V-I unit in operation, and for deceleration upon reaching our objective. Also, we are forced to remain below the 'limiting velocity' as a measure of safety. Else we may suffer another translation into the negative universe, as we once did before I learned how to control the intensifier.

"But we will make excellent time. Ninety-six hours should see us landing at New Oslo. And—" His pale eyes lighted. "And, gracious, this is wonderful! Diane will be surprised. If they're going to let me use the V-I unit, we'll return to Earth by way of Uranus in less time than it would ordinarily take to make the Earth-Mars shuttle!"

"But only," I pointed out, "if, when, and as you go make that gadget gadge. While we're gnawing the avoirdupois Cap Hanson's up there biting his fingernails to the knuckle. So shall we join the laddies?"

So he patted Diane's picture good-by, and we went.

LIKE I figured, Hanson was practically meat for the looney-bin by the time we reached the bridge. He manhandled Biggs avidly and propelled him to the plot-table. "Where've you been, Biggs?" he demanded. "No, don't tell me now. Get going on them figgers. They don't make sense to me, nowise! And when do we turn on that thingamajigger of your'n? Bert, where'd you find him? Shut up, you blabbermouth! Don't you know better than to talk when a space officer is cogitating? Can I help, Biggs?"

The one-man wordstorm was deafening. But it didn't seem to phase Biggs. He plunked himself down at the pilot's desk, scribbled for awhile, and came up with an orbit chart for Second Mate Dick Todd, seated at the control-board.

Then he heaved a volley of orders over

the audio to Chief Engineer Garrity, and that was that. He relaxed. The skipper said nervously, "Is—is that all?"

"That's all, sir," said Biggs.

The Old Man looked dubious.

"I don't hear nothing unusual," he said.

"You will in a minute," said Biggs. "Ah! There it goes now!"

And darned if it didn't! One minute my ears hummed with the familiar drone of the hypatomics, the next, a weird and piercing whine rose in high, shrill crescendo, torturing our ear-drums for a brief instant until it lost itself in an oblivion of super-sonic inaudibility.

That was all. No moment of oppressive weight as if we were lifting gravs at extra gees, no thunderous bellow of rockets, no anything. The ship rode easily, freely. I must have looked disappointed. To Biggs I said, "Too bad, sir."

"Eh, Sparks?"

"Too bad it didn't work," I said.

Biggs chuckled.

"But it did work, Sparks. We're now traveling at a speed in excess of five hundred million miles per hour!"

Cap Hanson gulped and looked green. "F-five—?"

"That's right, sir. If you don't believe me take a peek through the viewpanes."

I moved to the fore-wall, slid back the metal slide that covered the quartzite viewpane. Space lay before us—but *what* space! Not the dark, velvety pall, brightly agleam with an infinitude of starry jewels, that all spacemen know. This was a blotched, striped crazy-quilt of color! Crimson, ochre, emerald—all the hues of the rainbow, of the Aurora. It was beautiful in a mad, fantastic way; there was a faery, magic loveliness to that swift-streaming space that fascinated and at the same time chilled me with dread.

Hanson's eyes bulged, and his voice was fearful.

"We—we've done it again, Biggs! Busted clean out of our universe into something else!"

"No, sir. This is our universe. But we are seeing it as no man has ever seen it before. Our speed is so great that we are seeing the 'landmarks' of space with a distorted viewpoint. Our relationship—or I should say relativity — is no longer to Earth, or any of its sister planets, but to the Greater Constant, the fundamental motion of the universe itself.

"Thus, at one and the same time, we see the planets as they *are* and as they *were;* they are no longer mere points in space, they are streaks of color." And he grinned. "The stars, too. Pretty, aren't they?"

Cap Hanson made weak motions at the viewpane.

"Close it, Sparks! It's giving me the meemies! So if you're right, Biggs—then what? How do we know when we get to Uranus, or near it? If it's just a streak of color?"

"You must reconcile yourself to an entirely new system of astrogation. Up to this time, pilots have just jetted along until they found their goal, then set course for a landing. But with the V-I unit in operation, we 'fly blind' and set our course by strict, mathematical figuring. I have given Mr. Todd a plot-chart. Four days hence when I cut out the V-I unit and return to normal operation on the hypos, we will find Uranus immediately beneath us. And now, if you'll excuse me—"

"Wait a minute!" said the skipper. "Suppose we was to meet up with something in space? Like a rogue asteroid?"

Biggs shrugged.

"That hazard is neither heightened nor decreased," he said. "Our monitor-beams will still shunt off the smaller ones. As for the larger—well, you know as well as I that we have never yet found a method of overcoming that danger. It is one of the chances we take when we don space

blues. As far as I'm concerned, I'd just as soon not see it coming as to watch it grow larger and larger in the *perilens—"*

Well, he was right there. So since Hanson was fresh out of questions, Biggs hoisted hips back to his quarters. My guess is that he went back to billy-dooing with Diane's picture. What's yours?

I COULD build this up if I wanted to, and offer you a blow-by-blow account of what happened in the next quartet of days. But why bother? The truth is—nothing did. The V-I unit continued to chug along like a dream; our old crate went flashing through space like a quantum with a hot date; tempus squirmed; and me—I was in seventh heaven. I don't mean fifth or sixth, either. This was the easiest shuttle I had ever made. We were traveling so fast, and the V-I unit surrounded the *Saturn* with such a force-field, that my radio was utterly useless.

So I got a vacation with pay. I ate and slept with what you might call 'monotonous regularity', and I spent all of my waking hours curled up with a good (i.e. torrid) book.

And at the end of four days, Mr. Biggs disconnected his V-I unit, as called for on his plot-chart, and just like he said, there was Uranus gleaming beneath us! So we landed and spent a night swapping yarns and drinks with the S.S.P. officers garrisoned at New Oslo, then we took on a hold-full of gallium, and tootle-oo to the refrigerated seventh planet.

"And (this gets tiresome, doesn't it?) we accelerated for a day and a half, then Biggs plotted a course, pushed a button, and once again we were free-wheeling through colorful and star-spangled space.

Life was swell, and life was wonderful, and if there was any fly in my celestial ointment it was the fact that after the first week Lieutenant Romeo "Lovesick" Biggs got tired of staring at his fiancée's image and insisted on strolling up to my turret to tell me (1) what a wonderful girl she was, (2) how much he missed her, and (3) how he was simply going to *die* if he didn't see her again soon.

Which boring details I had (1) known for years, once having had a heart-throb for Diane myself, (2) figured from his conversation, and (3) high hopes that he would. Quietly!

So somehow it was the afternoon, ship's time, of the fourth day of the return shuttle and Biggs was in my turret, not to mention my hair, and I was hearing for the thousandth time about he wasn't worthy of a gal like Diane, when all of a sudden bells jangled all over the ship, lights flashed the DANGER! signal, and my turret-audio broke into frantic voice, and the voice was that of the pilot on duty, our Third Mate, Bud Wilson.

"Sparks, is Biggs there! Yes? Get him here *quick!* And find the Old Man! Hurry! For God's sake—"

We were out of there like a flash—make that *two* flashes—and pounding through the corridors, up the ramp to the bridge. We met Cap Hanson on the way. The three of us burst into the control-room to find Wilson tearing his hair, and Dick Todd, sweating, white-faced, poring over diagrams on the chart-board.

Somebody yelled, "What's the matter?" and I can't tell you who, because it was probably all of us. And Dick's eyes were haggard pockets in his face.

"Jupiter!" he said.

"What about it?" yelled the skipper. "Talk, man!"

Todd shoved the chart at Biggs, pointed with a finger that wobbled.

"It's on our trajectory! Right before us *now!* We can see it—Look!"

And he threw back the shield, and my heart gave an awful lurch. For no longer was the scene before us one of changing, iridescent beauty—the entire pane was cov-

ered by a gigantic, menacing platter. A monstrous missile of death. The planet Jupiter—dead on our course!

Lancelot Biggs' face, which had been keen and alert a moment before, was suddenly a dull, blank mask of horror. Strangled words fought their way from his throat.

"I—I didn't realize! I forgot all about Jupiter when I plotted the return course! I—"

"Forgot!" roared the skipper. "Great comets—forgot!" Then his wrath died in anxiety. "Do something. Turn off that blasted unit of yours so we can loft over her—"

But Todd shook his head.

"That's no use, Skipper. I thought of that. We're too close. We're caught in her gravitational attraction anyway. Even if we were to turn off Biggs' device, there still wouldn't be time to get the rockets hot."

"Lanse—" began the skipper. Then, "Where did he go?"

BECAUSE Biggs had turned, suddenly, and raced from the room! Fled, still clutching the space-chart. Fled, and not a word of advice, regret or hope. And with him went our last dwindling hope of salvation.

Dick Todd's voice was thin.

"Maybe he has an idea, sir?"

Hanson grasped at the thought as a drowning man.

"That's it, Todd. He'll pull us out of this. He's never failed us in the past—"

But even this wishful expression was doomed to swift contradiction. For at that moment the bridge audio flashed, and the voice of a sailor clacked from somewhere below.

"Captain Hanson, sir? There—there's trouble down here! Lieutenant Biggs has violated regulations, sir! He knocked down two men and forced his way into the auxiliary lifeboat! He—he's locked the door, sir. What shall we do?"

In the moment of silence that followed, I saw something I hope I shall never be forced to look upon again. I saw a proud man wilt before my eyes; I saw a strong man age ten years in as many seconds.

The man was Captain Hanson. The strength sloughed from his shoulders; pain burned deep furrows in his eyes; I could barely hear the whisper that crept from his lips.

"A coward!" he husked. "The man my daughter loves—a coward!"

And there was nothing I could say to refute the accusation. Lancelot Biggs' action had branded him more damningly than any mere words. A crisis had come—and it had found him wanting. He had deserted his comrades, his ship, and had fled to a lifeboat. Perhaps even now he was getting ready to cast off.

In a swift burst of comprehension, I thought I could understand the reason for this last, unreasonable defection. Lancelot Biggs had met difficulties before and without flinching.

But that was an old, a different, Biggs. Love had come into his life now. Love, and a woman, and all the dreams that happy men dare wish upon.

And these things, staunch and noble in themselves, had weakened the moral fibre of Biggs. Weakened it to the point where, in the face of danger, nothing was important except that he live to return to the arms of his loved one.

These things I could understand. But I could not forgive them. Because love or no love, fear or no fear, a spaceman has a tradition to live up to. And Lancelot Biggs had tossed into the discard the very tradition now upheld by Dick Todd as he said, quietly, "Shall I advise the men, sir?"

And by Captain Hanson who said, "Yes, Todd. And—and order Garrity to cut off Mr. Biggs' intensifier. We may die, but

we can die trying to escape. And a slower speed will give us more time—"

"Yes, sir," said Todd, and moved toward the audio. But he had barely reached out his hand toward it when sharp speech rasped from its black throat in remembered tones.

"Stop, Todd. Don't give that order, Skipper!"

It was the voice of Lancelot Biggs!

CAPTAIN HANSON had subdued his rage once. But now his face crimsoned, his great hands clenched, and fury was a ponderable vigor in his voice.

"Yes! Where are you, sir!"

"In the life-skiff," replied Biggs imperturbably.

Almost insolently, I thought. As if he knew he were speaking from the only place of possible security in a doomed ship. "Todd, do as I say and do it fast! There's no time to lose! Tell Chief Garrity to turn the verniers of my V-I unit *all the way* to the red line on the extreme right! Understand?"

Once again Hanson's roar interrupted. "Come back here, you coward, and die with your fellow-officers like the man you once pretended to be! What do you mean by skulking in a hideaway, giving orders aboard *my* ship?"

"Shut up!" bellowed Biggs. And it was not just his audacity in speaking thus to a space commander that shocked me, it was the razor-edged intensity of his voice. "Todd—give that order immediately! For God's sake, act! We've no time to lose!"

Todd's eyes sought mine. He knew, as well as I did, that the skipper was too furious to give an intelligent command.

"That — that's the limiting velocity, Sparks!" Todd choked. "Biggs must be insane. We'll be translated again into the negative universe. And no way to get back—*ever!*"

I didn't have to answer. Biggs answered. "I've taken care of that, Todd! Now, do as I say! Hurry, hurry!"

And—well, am I a fool? After all, Lancelot Biggs and I are old buddies. Once we were bunkmates, even. There came back to me a measure of the confidence I had once had in him. And I nodded to Todd.

"Try it, Dick. We've got nothing to lose and everything to gain. Give the order."

He did. Chief Garrity must have been startled but he was too good a spaceman to argue an order from the bridge. He said, succinctly, "Aye, sirr!" And then—

I felt the rocking plunge. The moment of brief, incredible dizziness of frightful speed being intensified to the limiting velocity of light. My head whirled, but somehow I managed to turn, stare at that ominous viewpane. And what I saw there brought a shocked cry from my lips!

White—white—dazzling white—then grayness! No other scene than dim and vacant void, gray, infinite, inpenetrable. A glimpse of the lost universe—the matrix negative wherein are flung such mad things as attain a speed beyond that of the limiting velocity.

Then crackling across the room agonizedly, "We're clear, Todd? We're through?"

And Todd replying dazedly, "I—I don't know what you mean?"

"The chronometer, man! Has it touched 9.14?"

"Yes, sir. But—but we're slipping into the negative, Lanse! We've escaped one death to find another!"

But there was infinite sadness to Lancelot Biggs' denial.

"No you're not, Todd. You're going back to your own universe—now. When you feel the ship lurch, turn the V-I unit dial back to where it was before. Ready? *Now!*"

And there came, inexplicably, a swift

unsteadiness, a lurching halt of the ship. At that instant Todd spoke to Garrity, Garrity obeyed, and—

We were once again traveling smoothly on our proper course. But Jupiter—monstrous missile of solid, terrible death—was no longer before us! *It was behind us!*

AS WE saw that, Captain Hanson laughed aloud. And vast was the joy of that laughter. Relief, happiness, sheer triumph. And apology. And he cried:

"You've done it, son! Forgive me for doubting you. We're safe! I don't know how, but—come on in, boy, and tell us all about it!"

But there came no answer. Only the echo of our own harsh breathing, the dry scrape of our own feet shuffling restlessly. And new terror loomed suddenly in the Old Man's eyes.

"Biggs!" he cried. "Lanse, my boy! Lanse!"

And then—

It was like the faintest, winnowed chaff of sound, breathing from far, far away. A voice speaking. To us. A voice that said:

"—can't come back . . . Skipper . . . Sparks will understand. Tell him . . . mass-energy . . . relationships. And tell . . . Diane . . . I love . . ."

That was all. And my brain reeled beneath the import of those fading words. Suddenly I *knew!* I didn't need to hear Cap Hanson screaming wild orders to the sailors on the aft deck below, nor to hear their answer.

"He's not here, sir. He cast off the auxiliary a moment or so ago."

I *knew!*

LATER, I told them. My explanation was short, for the solution was simple. Simple, once you grant that a man can possess infinite loyalty, infinite courage, in one lean and gangling frame.

"Biggs saw," I said, "that there was only one way to save us all from death. Oh, he had blundered, yes, but we all blunder sometimes. But not all of us pay the penalty as willingly, as bravely, as he did.

"Jupiter was upon us. Within minutes we would have crashed into the greatest of the solar planets. Only Biggs saw a way out. And that was—to make the speed of our ship *exactly* approximate the speed of light at the moment of impact!"

Dick said, "But how—"

"He told us the answer. Mass-energy relationships. You know the fundamental theory of the Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction. Objects moving in space are contracted along their major axis in direct proportion to their speed, with the limiting velocity, the speed of light, as their ultimate limit. In other words, at the precise speed of light, this ship existed in only a *unilateral* dimension!"

Hanson said, "You mean we—hurled over Jupiter?"

"No, sir. *We went right through it!* At that tremendous speed, our dimension-extension was zero. Hence it did not affect, nor was it affected in any way by, the bulk and mass of Jupiter.

"It's as though an exceedingly fine wire, moving at lightning speed, were to be propelled through a cake of ice. Only in our case, the 'wire' was of zero dimension, and the cake of ice—Jupiter—did not even recognize that it had been penetrated.

"But—" I shook my head. "But Mr. Biggs realized what this daring scheme meant. It meant that in addition to our size being reduced to the infinitesimal, our mass would be raised to the infinite—for that is the corollary of the contraction theory.

"There had to be some way of getting us back to our normal shape and size. The only possible method was by the forcible alteration of our mass. And — Biggs adopted this method. He placed himself in the life-skiff, gave the necessary orders

from there. Then, after the danger had been averted, he deliberately cast off from the *Saturn,* tossed himself away from us, a living sacrifice to the mathematical gods, that we might be safe."

Todd said, "Our mass, for a moment, was infinite—but when he, however briefly, broke clear, it became *less* than infinite, giving us a chance to cut the motors—"

"That's right."

Hanson's eyes were round and wild and fearful.

"But then—where is he! We've got to turn around right away. Find him! We can't go back without—"

I shook my head.

"It's no use, Skipper. He may be in this universe, infinitely small, traveling at infinite speed; he may be in some other universe undreamed by man. He may be living, he may be dead. But wherever he is—he is gone forever from the ken of man. Lancelot Biggs is—dead. So far as man is concerned, he is dead."

Dick Todd said something then. His words were not clear. They were choked, and he didn't finish the quotation. But I caught the first part.

" 'Greater love hath no man'," he said.

And the skipper coughed, and his eyes were red, and he turned away like a broken, aged man.

"Amen," he said. "Amen!"

SO—Lancelot Biggs is gone. Dead, perhaps. Or in another existence, undreamed, unrecognized, by we who spin our fiery trails along the spaceways. And it is a strange, strange thing that he, who of all men looked least like a spaceman, should have lived and died the greatest of them all.

Tomorrow or the next day I must tell Diane. Hanson will not do it because he can't.

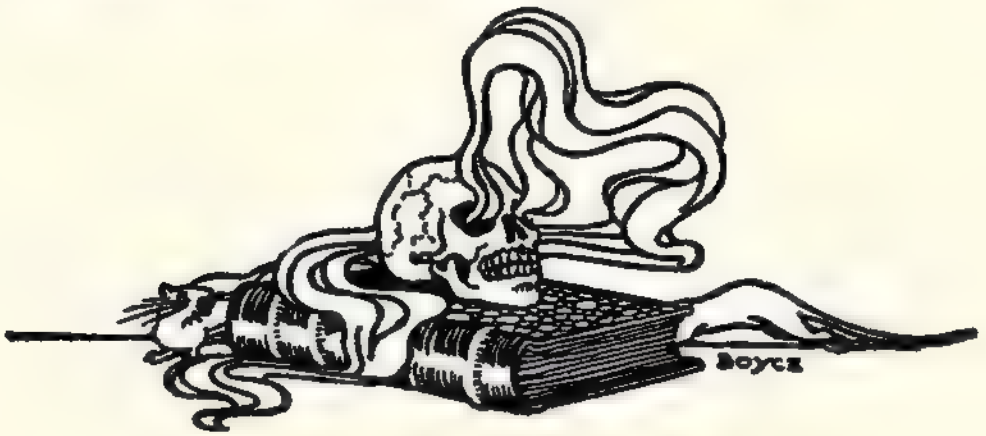
He dares not face her when she hears. And I, myself, would sell my soul to be free of that sad duty. But I was Lancelot Biggs' best friend, and this is the least last thing I can do in his memory.

There is nothing else to say. He is gone. Will I ever see him again? That gangling frame, that easy, fluent grin—lost in the nameless depths of the crypts of space. There seems nothing else to say except—good-by.

And so I say it to the stars. The far-flung stars amongst which, somewhere, is the finest man I ever knew.

Is it good-by, Mr. Biggs?

Or is it only "au revoir"?



The Man Who Lived

By RAYMOND F. O'KELLEY

He stepped from his Pimlico lodging house—into a London as dead as Babylon.

HUNGER and the sight of plenty drove Edward Penderby from the streets at 9 o'clock the night of that September 10. London's heat, pulsing at wall and roof all afternoon and evening, had made the Lupus Street attic oven-hot. He opened the window, and the effort left him panting.

Penderby was tired in body and mind, tired as only the workless on his futile quest can be. His underwear clung. The soles of his feet seered burning. The hun-

ger-pain had given way to an ache that throbbed between his eyes and the top of his head.

Picture this Penderby. Picture him as he lay, while the room darkened, on the soiled coverlet of the truckle-bed. Lanky, ill-shaven, black hair in need of cutting, eyes quick even in defeat, suit now so ragged that any employer would have been repelled; and in dubious control a clever, savage brain scheming ever to no purpose.

And ask why he was chosen.

Whatever the quality of Penderby's faculties, worry and fatigue had numbed his mind beyond the power of directed thought that night, and he stared as unthinkingly as a human being can at the lamp-thrown window-pattern taking shape on the slanted ceiling.

When that pattern was sharpest, he had fallen asleep, one leg still hanging over the side of the bed, and it was three hours after the automatic extinguishing of the street-lights wiped the design away that he awoke.

"If it weren't so infernally hot," he said, "I'd stay in bed."

Then he saw that he had slept in his clothes, and cursed. They would stick to his sweating skin more than ever. As he swung onto the edge of the bed, he felt the clamminess of them already.

But he washed, tiptoed down through the fetid lodging-house air, and stepped into the freshness of the street. He turned toward London's heart, and walked slowly.

What impelled him, what had caused him to leave his room so early and make a miserable day longer than it normally would have been, he did not know.

THE first body was outside a store at the corner. It was an old newspaper-seller's, in a greasy blue suit that shone. Copies of the *Evening Standard* and the *Star* had fallen from his arms to the sidewalk, Penderby, determined not to be an inquest witness, hurried past.

But beyond the corner was another body, a girl who had been standing in a doorway. Her body had folded into the attitude of a sleeper on the step, and her cigarette had burned away in the palm of one hand. There was no blood, so far as Penderby could see. But she might have been murdered; so might the old man, only a few feet away; and Penderby turned and ran.

He stopped short to avoid a bundle of rags and what had been a slum harridan.

He was frightened, now. He retreated to the middle of the street, and looked swiftly up and down. Two more bodies were about fifty yards away. And one was that of a policeman.

"What in thunder is this?" Penderby asked aloud. "Am I awake, anyway?"

He undeniably was, and the bodies still were there.

"They can't be asleep, all together," he said. "Nor drunk—look at that cop."

But he went back to the sidewalk, and touched the two bodies on it gingerly. He said, "Hey, wake up!"—and felt a little sacrilegious, as he tried to shake what had been the girl. They were corpses, without a doubt. So, he found, were the bodies of the policeman and the well-dressed youth nearby.

Five bodies! And not noticed, apparently till now.

"I don't give a damn," Penderby muttered. "Let someone else be a witness. *I'd* get no thanks for it, I'll bet."

On he went. A pair of cats had died on the steps of a house. What he assumed to be the body of a man lay on the other side of the street. "Let him lie there!"

He found himself counting the dead on Warwick Way. They seemed natural after a time; most, at a distance, were dark bundles that matched the drab street. His

astonishment gradually receded; it did not grow; it became a curtain in his awareness, a new background that gave a new proportion. But he stopped now and then to ponder the astounding fact once more, and his thinking did not lessen the fact that these streets in the center of London were filled with dead.

To one he did give heed. A girl, seventeen or eighteen, had been leaning out of a first-story window, face cupped in hands. Her elbows had spread on the sill, and her fingers had slid into her yellow hair. Chin and part of one cheek rested on the stone slab.

He ran to the door of the house. He pressed the bell, wielded the knocker till the street echoed. No one was aroused.

"It's a plague!" Penderby shouted. His voice was shrill. A sickly, light sweat stood on his forehead. "It's a plague! It's got all the town and it'll get me!"

But he began to reason, with the surprising coolness that marked most of what he did that day. He walked from one to another of six or seven bodies on the street. The expressions of the faces were those of persons who had tried to prevent themselves from slipping, from tripping, from being struck. There was no sign of panic. And there was no sign that anyone had run to aid anyone else.

"No," he concluded. "If it was a plague, it killed everyone at once. But a plague couldn't do that; and anyway how comes it that I'm here, after sleeping beside an open window all night?" Then, "But *am* I awake?"

He pinched the soft skin on the backs of his hands, in turn, several times, stamped, shook himself as if to fling a burden away.

He was awake. These others had died, Edward Penderby was alive.

He went on, his bearing less hesitant than before.

SIXTEEN or seventeen busses, passengers in all of them, drivers and conductors in a few, stood in the Victoria railroad-depot yard. Penderby did not enter any of them. He noted a blue-uniformed group in a corner, and remembered that drivers, conductors, and inspectors had gathered at the spot.

There was no sound of trains. One, bearing travelers from the Continent who had landed the evening before, had drawn in. Some doors were open, but the cars still were full.

Outside were taxi-men dead, newsboys dead, policemen dead. Two bodies in German-cut clothes had fallen into a gutter; they were those of refugees, probably.

Horror and alarm gained brief mastery, and Penderby fled the place. As he fled, Big Ben and Cathedral bells began to peal the useless hour, and made a clangor in his ears.

He stopped only when his lungs seemed about to burst and his aching legs could not carry him farther.

An automobile stood six feet from him. It was the first he had noticed. He stepped onto the running-board. But he had had to respect property, and he paused.

"Is there anyone alive here?" he shouted. Then he bawled the question.

There was no reply, and he slipped in. But the ignition had been locked and the key removed. He cursed in impatience already different from the vexations of his months of struggle, and jumped out. A bigger automobile was ahead, and the driver had slumped onto the wheel. He opened the nearest door, turned the body off balance and guided it to the ground, seated himself at the wheel, and started the engine. The key had been lying on the floor.

Bicycles, cars and bodies blocked the way every few yards; so Penderby traveled slowly. He passed the houses of Parlia-

ment and Government buildings in Whitehall.

Trafalgar Square contained more dead than even the space outside the depot. He spared them only a glance. The air was chill, and the hunger that sleep had held off had returned. He drove to a big restaurant three hundred yards away, and, somewhat timidly despite all he had seen, walked in.

The restaurant had been full. He halted at a table at which a middle-aged man had sat. On it were beef, ham, cakes, bread and butter, a pot of tea. Standing, he snatched food in both hands, and as he ate wolfishly from one, the other was stretched for still more. But he could not eat as much as he had expected; his stomach had been used to little.

He was thirsty. The long-cold tea cut the saliva from his tongue; still, it was bitter, and he set the pot, from which he had gulped, back with a crash. He remembered that he was in the less-expensive section. He returned to the entrance-hall, stepped over bodies of waiters and others, and went up the broad stairs.

Bottles and glasses stood on a table near the cashier's desk in the second dining-room. He poured a glass of wine. He swallowed it in a second, poured and drank another; and, a little less quickly, another. His body began to tingle; he lost awareness of blistered feet and sticky clothes.

"This is something like it!" said Penderby.

Bottle and glass on knees, he sat on a chair he had drawn a little apart, and mused in a mingling of contentment and glee.

His mind suddenly seized on the fact that the dead he faced had been more than well-to-do. He leaped onto the chair, waved bottle and glass aloft, and cried:

"Silence!"

His voice mounted to a singsong screech:

"Ladies and gentlemen! Ladies *and* gentlemen! You simply cannot know the pleasure it gives me to be with you this morning! There's a slight difference, to be sure, between your standing and mine just now, but you're big enough to overlook it, aren't you?

"Well, ladies and gentlemen of the upper crust, I give you——"

There Penderby paused.

"What *do* I give you?"

He rubbed his forehead with the wet bottle-spout.

"I've got it! I give you discontent, disappointment, starvation, clothes the dogs bark at—and a happy death!"

He drank the toast, sent bottle and glass sliding and spinning along the waxed floor, and ran down the stairs. He was exhilarated as never before; he was triumphant.

THE Strand, London's most famous thoroughfare, which leads from Trafalgar Square to Fleet Street, was strewn with dead. They had fallen at bus stops, in late-shutting stores (lights in some of these burned still), on pedestrian crossings, in busses and automobiles that had crashed against one another and in places formed a barrier from wall to wall. Here and there, wheels had squeezed blood into oozy patches.

A bus had shattered a café window, and spilled cakes and pastries onto the sidewalk. Another had snapped an electric-light post, and wires lay in curls and tangles for sixty yards.

One wing of a Rolls-Royce, a white-haired woman in the back, had littered a section of pavement with the plate glass of a clothing-store.

Penderby climbed in, and in ten minutes was wearing a tweed jacket, flannel trousers, a gray shirt, light underwear, clean socks, and a yellow belt. He took a pair

of brown shoes from a store nearly opposite, and then sought the effect in a mirror in the dim rear.

"I don't look too bad," he commented, "considering everything."

He went back to the street.

"And now to see what's become of the rest of the eight million."

Penderby had begun to utter his thoughts.

But it was not in fear—so far as he knew, at least. Nor was he lonely after this inexplicable departure of his fellow-creatures.

He picked his way among the dead for about half a mile. The number decreased as he neared Fleet Street, and he took a bicycle from the doorway of a store and rode, with little difficulty, into London's Newspaper Row.

The stare of what had been a policeman at a lamppost near the court buildings brought him up with a jerk that nearly threw him off the machine. For a moment, he thought that another had been spared. But the eyes did not move. Only for a wastepaper-bin, shoulder-high, on the pole, and his straddling legs, the policeman would have fallen as he died.

Penderby was slightly hungry when he came to a corner lunch-counter; so he climbed over the bar, mixed a milk-shake as he had seen attendants do, and drank it between bites of a stale ham sandwich.

He rode on, and dismounted at a newspaper office. He walked in. The front office contained twelve or fourteen bodies, three or four those of clerks. He climbed the marble-and-concrete stairs two at a time. He had searched two corridors when he opened a door marked "News Room."

THERE were bodies at nearly half the desks, and one had fallen beside the half-opened door of a telephone booth, in which the instrument hung the full length of the cord. A head pressed the keys of a typewriter on a desk near, and some of the type-bars were in midair. Penderby pulled a sheet of paper from the machine. The word "Churchill" and the number "3" were in the top left corner.

He read:

> "Mr. Churchill declared that he did not favor any 'attitude, policy, or frame of mind' that could be construed as 'containing even the germ of what has been called' encirclement, but that he would oppose any atte——"

No more.

"Good God!" murmured Penderby.

He moved to the desk alongside. A young man had begun a story about a loan-failure. He had typed a line of hyphens through "said," and substituted "asserted."

Penderby went to all the other desks occupied. No one had been writing of death.

"How could they have known, after all?" he reasoned. "It probably got everyone at the same time. It *must* have."

He wandered through the composing-room and down a spiral, metal staircase to the pillared press-room. The remote bulbs still glared. In the light diluted by mud-spattered, wire-netted windows, they did little but bring glints to the shiny parts of the machines.

One press had run off an early edition. It had continued to run, it seemed, long after those who had tended it died. A hill of papers hid the little gate out of which they had come.

A man in dungarees had been leaning against a steel pillar of another machine. A face-high metal button shone on the pillar; it had been handled often. Penderby pressed it, and the machine began to roll. He retreated to the door as the rush of paper merged with a thunderous hammering; then returned, and lifted one of the papers already carried out.

The main story was about Russia and Germany.

"If they could have waited," he said, "they'd have had a bigger story than that. But I suppose they couldn't. They had to go with the rest."

The press still ran, and the concrete floor vibrated. The sight and the sound of it, with the recollection of what he had seen in the news room, stirred something akin to pity in the man. Brains, hands, metal here had been working when death had come, and if ever the product of journalism had been of fleeting value it was now.

Penderby did not know how to stop the press, and the noise irritated him after awhile. He found the rear exit, a grimy, steel-grilled door that opened onto a lane. He turned right, the direction in which a number of trucks had been turned, and found himself on Fleet Street again.

His throat was parched, and he decided to look for more drink. Beer would be best, for the forenoon was hot. He filled two big glasses in a saloon, brought them out, placed them on the curb, and sat beside them in the sunlight.

This time, he drank slowly. He had slipped a newspaper into a jacket pocket, and he idly read and drank for half an hour. The day was serene, and had brought an air purer than London had breathed in a century.

The man to whom all London—if not all Britain—had passed dropped the paper. For he had noted that purity of the air. He wondered how long it would last. The street contained enough corpses to start a plague after another day or so. He could not bury them, not to mention the rest of the eight million in Greater London.

"I suppose," Penderby decided, "I'll have to leave. Well, it wouldn't take long to get out by car."

But whither? The countryside, in all likelihood, would be as perilous as the city; no district in Britain was thinly-populated.

"Oh, the hell with it!" was his conclusion. Having dismissed the problem for the moment, he went into the saloon for more beer.

He was tired, and it was nearly noon when he stretched himself and decided to explore farther; only a little farther, for the heat was intense. He cycled across Ludgate Circus, at the end of Fleet Street, and up Ludgate Hill. Dead, as he had expected, everywhere; silence complete, save for the faint noise of the bicycle.

He was in the financial center. This region of swarming clerks and dull buildings had interested him little at any other time, and only the coolness of narrow streets between high, gray walls induced him to go in now. The bodies he saw were few; life normally had left the district with the closing of offices at 5 p.m.

Ahead was a bank. He dismounted at the curb in front of it. A gate stood between sidewalk and door. The windows were high, deep, and barred.

"If I weren't so tired," Penderby reflected, "I'd go in—even if it took a month."

The place could tell him nothing, he saw. As he rode back to the Strand, he pondered the fact—the most illuminating so far as his new life was concerned—that the district of money was the least useful in all London.

PENDERBY was sleepy now, though it still was early afternoon. The stimulus of wine and beer had worn off, and the alcohol made him drowsy. He cycled as far as a luxury hotel before which taxis and limousines had been busy the night before, left the machine tilted against one of the glass doors, and walked in.

Some of the well-dressed guests had died

in armchairs, others on divans. More, standing, had fallen in groups that even now, somehow, told of their easy, unvexed lives of conversation and travel. Penderby, glancing round, was glad that the bitterness in him had not died.

The first door he opened after he went upstairs moved only a few inches; something had fallen against it. On the floor of the next room was the body of a man. A woman and a little girl had died in another.

The fourth was empty. A door in it led to a bathroom. He turned the hot water on. It still was at boiling-point, and as he waited till it had cooled he shaved with a good sharp razor someone had left on the dressing-table.

Penderby, despite the luxury of steam and soap and water to his chin, did not linger in the bath. He had begun to hurry. For what? He did not know. But the cool sheets soothed him. The comfort of the bed was so exquisite that, to sense it as long as possible, he tried to stay awake. The sleep into which he soon fell was dreamless, and lasted till 7 p.m.

He made tea in the big kitchen, below street-level, and brought butter and cold roast chicken from a refrigerator and fine bread from a chrome-and-white cupboard. When he left the hotel, he was munching a sandwich made of remnants of the meal.

The Strand was gray and, in corners and gaping store-fronts here and there, black. Rain had made scattered pools that gave the street a shabby, defeated look. The only light they reflected was the little left in the sky. All the street-lamps had failed now, and the store-lights that had outlived the day were few and ineffectual.

It was as Penderby looked round Trafalgar Square, somber and a little frightening, that he felt his first bewilderment, apart from the shocks of surprise, of that day. He sat on a balustrade outside South Africa House, and tried to plan the suddenly monstrous-appearing future.

He could not stay in the vast charnel-house London had become. A day or two more, as he already had warned himself, and plague would ride every breath of air. But his food was in London; he could not turn farmer at short notice, and the supplies in stores and hotels would last very long.

The Continent? But he hardly could manage a boat even on the short Dover-Calais voyage, could he? Then, he had not heard nor seen aircraft since the afternoon before. If air-liners had come from France and other countries, and landed at a dead airdrome, the pilots, undoubtedly, would have flown from Croydon on to London. Had everyone in France, Germany, Spain, Italy died? Was he the only one spared? Were there French, German, Spanish, Italian Edward Penderbys?

The Square was cold, lonesome. He left his perch stiffly, and turned onto the Strand once more. He stumbled over a body now and then. Clouds that had scudded from the west broke in a short, heavy shower, and it brought a damp smell from the heaps of wet clothes on every side.

The hotel was in darkness, and he leaned against a bronze-encased pillar outside and began to smoke a cigar he had found in the bedroom. The dead he did not fear, but he was uneasy in the midst of so vast a number of them; besides, the excitement of the day had left him a little nervous. And hours of wakefulness would be the price of his evening's sleep.

PENDERBY began to wonder about the Thames. What had happened to the ships on the river, the men who had lived in them? A street near by led to the water, and in five minutes he was leaning over the wall and trying to count the vessels in the dusk. Two were little holiday steamers,

heeled over slightly. One of the four or five motorboats had rubbed along the wall as the tide ebbed, and was held in the angle of the nearer bridge.

Warehouses and other buildings beyond the river were forbidding masses that added to the gloom of the water and hid all but a few mud-gleams, here and there.

Penderby was sorry for having come. The scene was the most mournful the dead city had shown him. But he would not go back to the hotel yet. Approach of night seemed to have sharpened his senses, and the early-afternoon restlessness had returned.

A body lay sixty or seventy yards away, in the direction of Trafalgar Square. It was the only one in sight. The spread-eagled symmetry of it stirred his curiosity, and he walked quickly toward it. But something held him back, and his pace became slow, then very slow. And then he was trembling.

He stooped over the body. Recognition came without a shock. He was looking at Edward Penderby, lanky, ill-shaven, in ragged clothes. But the eyes, wide open, were quiet, and the lines beside the mouth had softened.

The man who had lived dropped on one knee, and touched the angular forehead with an objective pity.

"So you went, too," he said.

* * * * *

THERE still were some traces of what had been London when life came back to the earth; green, creeper-tied heaps of concrete and steel, for instance, and flooded steel vaults beneath banks, and a few big guns in arsenals, and presses, now in rust, under Fleet Street ruins. Rain, wind, heat, and cold had seen to the rest, and the two bodies—one well-dressed, the other shabbily—on a street beside the Thames had been dust many a year.

SUPERSTITIONS

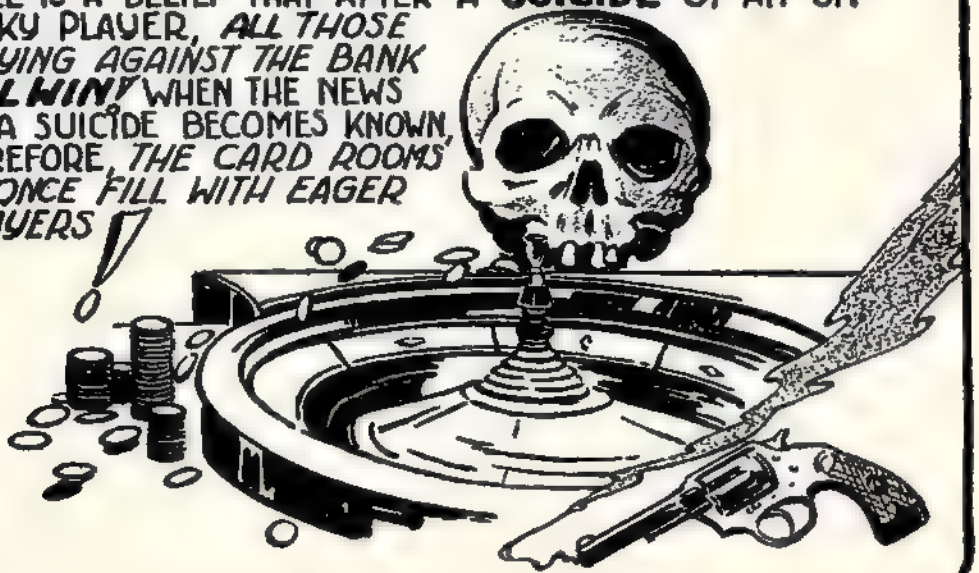
AS THE TRADITIONAL COMPANION OF WITCHES, THE **BLACK CAT** HAS BECOME AN OMEN THAT ***MISFORTUNE AND ILL LUCK*** *WILL QUICKLY FOLLOW IN ITS WAKE...* IN EARLY TIMES SUPERSTITIOUS PEOPLE BELIEVED THAT WITCHES AND EVIL SPIRITS COULD ASSUME THE FORMS OF BLACK ANIMALS, PARTICULARLY BLACK CATS—AND DURING THE MIDDLE AGES *THE BRAIN OF A BLACK CAT WAS CONSIDERED AN IMPORTANT INGREDIENT IN WITCHCRAFT RECIPES AND PRESCRIPTIONS.* THE OLD NOTION CONCERNING THE NINE LIVES OF A CAT GOES BACK TO THE **ANCIENT EGYPTIANS** WHOSE CAT-HEADED GODDESS, **PASHT,** *WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE NINE LIVES..* THEY REGARDED BLACK CATS WITH THE UTMOST REVERENCE *AND MUMMIFIED REMAINS OF THEM ARE FREQUENTLY FOUND IN THE SAME TOMBS AS THEIR WORSHIPPERS.*

AND TABOOS by Hall

THE ORIGIN OF THE VERY OLD SUPERSTITION THAT A **FOUR-LEAFED CLOVER** PORTENDS **FORTUNE** AND **HAPPINESS** IS LOST IN ANTIQUITY.. ONE OLD LEGEND IS THAT EVE, UPON BEING EJECTED FROM THE **PARADISE**, *TOOK A FOUR-LEAFED CLOVER WITH HER.*

BECAUSE THE CLOVER WAS A BIT OF GREEN FROM THE GARDEN OF PARADISE, ITS PRESENCE IN ONE'S OWN GARDEN CAME TO BE LOOKED UPON AS AN OMEN OF GOOD LUCK... AT ONE TIME THERE WAS A CUSTOM OF STREWING FOUR-LEAFED CLOVERS AS GOOD LUCK OMENS BEFORE A BRIDE TO INSURE HER HAPPINESS.

IN **MONTE CARLO** AND OTHER GAMBLING PLACES THERE IS A BELIEF THAT AFTER A **SUICIDE** OF AN UNLUCKY PLAYER, *ALL THOSE PLAYING AGAINST THE BANK* ***WILL WIN!*** WHEN THE NEWS OF A SUICIDE BECOMES KNOWN, THEREFORE, *THE CARD ROOMS AT ONCE FILL WITH EAGER PLAYERS!*



He was wild with rage, for hunters had killed his mate. He snatched her up —and bore her off to the forest.

Birthmark

By SEABURY QUINN

She was haunted by a curse—a blight born in the steaming jungles of Equatorial Africa.

LAST-MINUTE shopping at Liberty's and the Garelies LaFayette had taken more time than I'd reckoned, and the six-seated compartment to which I'd been assigned on the Treves *rapide* was nearly filled when I finished checking through the provost marshal's booth at the Gare del'Est and scuttled down the inner platform. Three of the four early arrivals I recognized: Amberson

who as a former New York police lieutenant had been assigned to the Intelligence, Weinberg of the Medical Corps, like me assigned to base hospital work in Treves, and Fontenoy apKern, an infantryman about to take up duties at the provost marshal's office at the old walled city.

The fourth man was unknown to me and, for no reason I could think of, I disliked him with the sudden spontaniety of a chemical reaction. The double braid on his cuffs marked him as a captain and where the raccoon collar of his short coat was thrown back I saw crossed rifles on the neckband of his blouse. His uniform was well-cut and expensive—English made, I guessed—his blond hair neatly trimmed, his slim, long, white hands sleekly manicured. More of a fop than a soldier he seemed, some dandy from the fashionable East Fifties with a bullet-proof commission going from the secretariat at Paris to staff headquarters at Coblenz; but in the army one goes where he is sent and does the work they set him at; it wasn't mere resentment of a grime-and-blood veteran for a pantywaist soldier that stirred my quick, instinctive dislike. It was the smug arrogancy of him. Clear-cut as the image on a coin his profile silhouetted against the window, high-cheeked, hard-eyed, sharp-chinned. Prussian as an *oberleutnant* of the Elite Guards Corps, that face would have seemed more in its proper setting above the field gray of a German uniform than the olive drab of our army.

The stranger glanced up quickly at my advent and I had a momentary glimpse of faintly sneering mouth and hard, cold, haughty eyes, then he resumed his reading of the Paris edition of the London Daily Mail.

Greetings were in character: "Hullo," said Amberson, sweeping me with the quick look of suspicion which is the mark of the professional policeman. "Thought you'd gone A.W.O.L.," grinned Weinberg. "Wouldn't blame you if you had. Lot o' flu up Treves way; lots o' work for us poor suckers in the M.C." "Hi, lug!" apKern saluted me. "Mopped 'em all up on the Paris sector and goin' up to croak a few in Germany?"

The blond captain of infantry took no notice of me, or any of us.

I stumbled over an assorted lot of feet, stowed my duffel in the rack above my seat and dropped down on the hard cushions. The place across from me was vacant, but a white card indicated it had been reserved. "Wonder who'll draw it?" apKern wondered. "Pity the poor bloke, havin' to look at your ugly mug from here to Treves. Gosh, when I came to up at Catigny and saw you starin' at me I thought I still was under ether and havin' a bad dream! If I could a' talked I'd a' asked the nurse to slip me a fresh dose of anesthetic—"

"Quiet!" cut in Weinberg. "Who'd know when you were conscious or anesthetized, anyhow? If I'd been there I would a' operated on you as they brought you in, you—" His amiable insults stopped half uttered, and a sudden blankness wiped expression from his face as he looked past apKern to the compartment door.

Followed by a railway porter a girl stood at the entrance, and I felt my own heart skip a beat as I looked at her. Mentally I commented, "There ain't no such animal!"

She was quite young, not more than twenty-three or -four, quite breath-taking in her loveliness. A red cross gleamed upon her overseas cap, beneath her heavy dark coat with its wide fur collar showed a white stock and the well-cut, smoothly-fitting whipcord uniform of the Red Cross Motor Corps. Three service chevrons on her left cuff showed she was no post-Armistice importation, and her utter lack of self-consciousness showed she was at home with soldiers. More like an effeminate boy than a young woman she seemed

as she stepped lissomely between the rows of booted feet and dropped down in the seat across from me. I realized her eyes were golden, a light brown that was almost orange, harmonizing to perfection with her copper hair, her smooth pale cheeks and slim red lips.

When she took her cap off and shook her hair I saw that it was close-cropped, almost like a man's, and riotous with curls.

I cast a glance at apKern, sitting two seats from her, and he must have read the malice in my eyes, for almost instantly he sounded off. "See this?" he tapped the dispatch case that rested on his knees. "Lot o' valuable dope in here; list o' suspected enemy agents and so forth I'm takin' up to Treves. 'Captain apKern,' the general says to me, 'I've got some very confidential documents to go to Germany. They're so secret that I daren't trust 'em to an ordinary courier. Only a man of proved sagacity, indomitable courage and more than usual cleverness can be entrusted with these papers, Captain. You're going up to Treves, aren't you?'

" 'Sure, General,' I tells him. 'I'm fed up with all this coffee-collin' in Paris; want to get where there's a chance for action, so I'm joinin' the M.P.'s at Treves. I'll be happy to accommodate you by taking those papers, and you need fear nothing. They'll be safe with me as if—' "

" 'You published 'em in the New York Times,' " completed Amberson sarcastically.

I glanced across the narrow aisle at the girl. She was joining in the laugh that followed Amberson's deflation of apKern. Her lips were opening like a flower and a smile glowed in her orange eyes. "Lovely!" I whispered to myself. "Perfect—" as I eyed the long sweet line from her waist to knee, from knee to ankle, the small gentle bosom and the long slim hands and feet —"she's just perfect."

THE guard had blown his absurd tin trumpet and we slid out of the station, past the platform bright with French officers in fur coats or long capes of horizon blue, like birds of brilliant plumage among the somber O.D. of our own and British uniforms, through the blinking lights that marked the station yard and out into the fog-blurred night.

The train had a *wagon-restaurant* and presently the girl went forward, followed in a moment by apKern, Weinberg and Amberson. I'd lunched late at the Café de la Paix and had no wish for food, so settled back in my seat with a copy of the Bystander.

Our coach was German, taken over by the Allies, and a sign phrased with Teutonic arrogance stared at me from the farther wall of the compartment with the information that such indiscretions as smoking or falling from the window were stringently *verboten* under penalty of heavy fine. I grinned at it. I was an American soldier on my way to conquered territory. Presently their officers would be saluting me as I walked down the street, their civilians crowding to the curb to give me sidewalk-room. Their signs meant nothing to me, and I broke out a packet of Fatimas. "Smoke?" I proffered the pack to my silent companion.

"No," he returned shortly, never glancing up from his paper, and with renewed irritation I realized that he had not added "thank you," to his refusal.

In a little while the diners came back from their meal, on the best possible terms with each other, and I was duly presented to Miss Fedocia Watrous of Philadelphia. Moved by common courtesy I bent to catch the aloof infantryman's eye, intending to introduce him. For just a moment he looked up at me above his paper, and I was fairly chilled by the cold challenge in his agate stare. To hell with him! All of us, except Amberson who was a major, were

his equals in rank. Where did he get off treating us like a lot of railway porters? Let him read his London Daily Mail and be damned to him!

Stories of the front and service of communciations lines, of base hospitals, Paris, Brest and Saint-Nazaire sped the time till we passed Epernay and the air grew cold with a hard bitterness while the fog congealed to sleety rain that spattered like thrown sand against the window and gushed down the glass like the back-wash of a sullen tide. The window casing somehow rattled loose from its slides, and a current of chilled air, with now and then a spit of sleet, came straight against me. After several ineffectual efforts to right matters I turned the collar of my trench coat up about my ears, slid down until I rested on the extreme end of my spine, and sought forgetfulness of my discomfort in sleep.

Conversation had died down to monosyllables, even apKern seemed drained dry of wisecracks, and Amberson rose lurching from his seat. "See you in the morning—I hope," he rumbled, jerking at the leather cord that worked the single light in the compartment. For a moment the globe glowed with fading incandescence, then we were smothered in Cimmerian darkness.

Was it a trick of tired nerves, the retention of the light-image upon my retina in the dark? I wondered. Somehow, it seemed to me that as night flattened on the window and the blackness closed about us the orange eyes of the girl sitting opposite me glowed with a sort of smoky, sulphurous luminance, like those of a cat, in the gloom. The impression lasted but a moment. Either she had lowered her lids or my eyes had grown accustomed to the lack of light, and I was staring sightlessly into a shadow as impenetrable as a velvet curtain.

Memory was scratching at my brain, softly but insistently as a cat demanding admission to a room. Miss Watrous' face was poignantly familiar to me and, dimly, I connected it with something vaguely unpleasant.

I tried to fit the pieces of the mental picture-puzzle together, assembling keywords, fumbling with my thoughts. The riddle of her strange familiarity—that persistent thought, "I've seen her somewhere"—was within reach of my brain if only I could get the facts in proper perspective, I was sure. Her name: Fedocia Watrous. Did its syllables strike some note of memory? No. Try again: That face, that sweet, pale oval face, almost too perfect in its symmetry, the long red lips of that red, sensitive mouth, those glowing orange eyes and hair as russet as the leaves of a copper-beech in autumn; she came from Philadelphia—I had it!

The triumph of remembering brought me up right in my seat, I almost snapped my fingers in delight. Not faintly, but clear-cut as a motion picture flashed upon a screen, I saw that scene in Fairmount Park. I was in my final year of internship and, as always, short of money, had gone to the zoo for the afternoon. Beside the monkey cage a boy and girl stood idly. Through closed lids I could see them perfectly with my mind's eye, the lad in baggy trousers rolled high above his ankles to display bright socks, a V-necked sweater with the F that showed he was an athlete at Friends' School; the girl in Peter Thompson suit, hatless, her small proud head aflame with copper hair as sweetly poised as a chysanthemum upon its stalk. They had a bag of sugar cookies and had tossed one to the ravenous little rhesus monkeys swarming up the bars. One of the greedy little simians fastened on a cake fragment with its hand, then, not content, seized another with its hand-like foot, leaped to an overhanging perch and proceeded to feed itself, nibbling first from the bit clutched in its hand, then from the fragment grasped in its prehensible foot.

"Look there!" the lad exclaimed as he nudged his companion. "Lookit that glutton feedin' his face with hands *and* feet. Bet you couldn't do that!"

The innocent remark was devastating in effect. The girl seemed suddenly to lose all strength and wilted brokenly against the railing set before the cages. Her face was twisted in mute agony, her brow was glistening with sweat, her cheeks had gone pale with a pallor that passed white and seemed gray verging on green. And from the tortured mask of stricken features her eyes seemed to beg for pity.

I ran to offer her my help, but she smiled away my kindly meant assistance. "A—little—faint," she murmured in a voice that shook as if it took her last remaining ounce of strength to speak. "I'll—be—all—right." Then with the frightened boy assisting me we got her to the red-wheeled dog-cart waiting by the fountain, and he had driven her away.

That had been in 1910—nine years ago. I had been a barely-noticed bystander—a member of the audience of her brief drama—she had been the star of the short tragedy. No wonder she had failed to recognize in the uniformed medical officer the callow intern who had helped her.

Was there, I asked myself as I leaned back against the hard, uncomfortable cushions of the German railway coach, some connection between the lad's reference to her inability to feed herself with her foot and her collapse, or had she been seized with a fainting spell? If she had, it sounded like a cardiac affection, yet the girl who slept so peacefully across from me was certainly in the prime of health. More, she must have passed a rigid physical examination before they let her come overseas. Puzzling over it I saw the lights of Châlons station flash past, watched the darkness deepen on the window pane once more, and fell into a chilled, uncomfortable sleep.

CONSCIOUSNESS came to me slowly. The window had worked farther down in its casings, and sleet-armed rain was stabbing at my face. My feet and legs felt stiff with a rheumatic stiffness, my head was aching abominably.

"Damn these Jerry coaches," I swore spitefully as I rose to force the window back in place. "If I ever see a Pullman car again I'll—"

My anger protests slipped away from my lips. The blackness of the night had given way to a diluted gray, and by this dim uncertain light I made the forms of my companions out— and there was something horribly wrong with them. ApKern was slumped down in his seat as if he had been a straw man from which the stuffing had been jerked, Amberson lay with feet splayed out across the aisle; Weinberg's shoulders drooped, his hands hung down beside his knees and swung as flaccidly as strings with each movement of the train. The girl across from me lay back against her cushions, head bent at an unnatural angle. Thus I called the roll with a quick frightened glance, and noted that the stranger was not present.

Yes, he was! He was lying on the floor at apKern's feet, one arm bent under him, his legs spread out as though he'd tried to rise, felt too tired for it, and decided to drop back. But in the angles of his flaccid legs, their limpness at the hips and knees and ankles, I read the signs no doctor has to see twice. He was dead.

The others? I jerked the leather light-cord, and as the weak bulb blossomed into pale illumination took stock. Dead? No, their color was too bright. Their cheeks were positively flushed—too flushed! I could read it at a glance. Incredibly, I was the only person in that cramped compartment not suffering carbonic oxide poisoning.

I drove my fist through the window, jerked the door open, and as the raw air

whistled through the compartment bent to examine Miss Watrous. Her pulse was very weak but still perceptible, so were Weinberg's, Amberson's and apKern's. The stranger was past helping and the air would help revive the others. My first job was to find the *chef de train*—the conductor—and report the casualty.

"Find whoever is in charge of this confounded pile o' junk," I told an enlisted man I met in the corridor of the next coach. "There's been an accident back there—four officers and a Red Cross woman gassed—"

"Gassed?" he echoed unbelievingly. "Does the captain mean—"

"The captain means just what he says," I snapped. "Go get me the conductor toot sweet. Shake it up!"

"Yes, sir." He saluted and was off like the proverbial shot, returning in a few moments with a young man whose double bars proclaimed him a captain, with the red R denoting he was in the Railroad Section on his shoulder.

It was no time to stand on ceremony. Technically, I suppose, the Medical Corps outranked the Railroad Section, but I tendered him a salute. "Gas?" he echoed as the corporal had when I completed my recital.

"If we haven't five cases of carbon monoxide poisoning—one of 'em fatal—back there I never rode an ambulance," I answered shortly. "How it happened I don't know—"

"How'd you happen not to get it?" he broke in suspiciously.

"I was sitting by the window, and it worked loose in the night. Air blew directly in my face. That accounts for the girl's not being more affected, too. She was facing backward, so didn't get the full effect of ventilation, but her case seems the mildest. Major Amberson who was farthest from the window seems most seriously affected, but all of them were unconscious."

We had reached the compartment as I concluded. "Help me with this poor chap," I directed, bending to take up the dead man's shoulders. "If they have a spare compartment we can put him in that."

"There's one right down the corridor," he told me. "Party debarked at Châlons when we took the train over from the Frogs."

"Thank the Lord for that," I answered. "If the French were still in charge we'd have the devil of a time explaining—*ah!*" Amazement fairly squeezed the exclamation from me.

"What is it, sir?"

"This," I answered, reaching under apKern's feet and holding up a metal cylinder. The thing was six or eight inches long by about two inches in diameter, made of brass or copper, like those fire extinguishers carried on trucks and buses in America, and fitted with a nozzle and thumb-screw at one end.

"What's it smell like?" he demanded, staring at my find uncomprehendingly.

"Like nothing. That's just it—"

"How d'ye mean—"

"That cylinder was filled with CO—carbon monoxide—which is a colorless and odorless gas almost as deadly as phosgene. It was pumped in under pressure and late last night someone turned the thumb-screw while we were asleep, let the gas escape, and—"

"Nuts!" he interrupted with a shake of his head. "No one would be such a fool. It'd get him, too—"

"Yes?" I broke in sarcastically. "Think so, do you?" Rolling the dead man over to get a grip beneath his arms I had discovered something he was lying on. A small, compact, but perfect gas mask.

"Well—I'll be a monkey's uncle!" he declared as I held my find up. "I sure will. But how'd it happen he was the only one to get it in the neck, when he was all prepared—"

"That's what we'll have to find out, or what a board of inquiry will determine," I replied. "Help me get him into that compartment, then we'll see about first aid for these—"

"Here, what goes on?" Weinberg sat up suddenly and stared about him like a man emerging from a bad dream. "What're you guys up to?"

"How d'ye feel?" I countered.

"Terrible, now you mention it. My head is aching like nobody's business, but" —he bent and touched the supine dead man, then straightened with a groan as he pressed hands against his throbbing temples—"what's all this? Did his Nibs pass out, or—"

"Clear out," I assured him. "He's dead as mutton, and the rest of us came near joining him. Look after 'em a moment, will you? I'll be right back."

Fresh air and copious draughts of cognac, followed by black coffee and more brandy, had revived the gas victims when I returned. Amberson was still too weak to stand, apKern complained of dizziness and clouded vision, but Weinberg, tough and wiry as a terrier, seemed none the worse for his close call. Due to her seat beside the window Miss Watrous seemed less seriously affected than the rest. In half an hour she was ministering to apKern and Amberson, and they were loving it.

"LOOK here, Carmichael," Weinberg said as we bent above the dead man while Amberson went through his papers, "this is no case of CO poisoning."

"If it isn't I never used a pulmotor on a would-be suicide in South Philly," I rejoined. "Why, there's every indication of—"

"Of your granddad's Sunday-go-to-meetin' hat!" he broke in. "Take a look, Professor."

Obediently, I bent and looked where he was pointing. "Well, I'll be—" I began, and he grinned at me, wrinkling up his nose and drawing back his lips till almost all his teeth showed at the same time.

"You sure will," he agreed, "but not until you've told me what you make of it."

"Why, the man was throttled!" I exclaimed.

There was no doubting it. Upon the dead man's throat were five distinct livid patches, one, some three inches in size, roughly square, the other four extending in broken parallel lines almost completely around the neck.

"What d'ye make of it?" he insisted.

I shook my head. "Possibly the bruise left by some sort of garotte," I hazarded. "The neck's broken and the hyoid bone is fractured; dreadful pressure must have been exerted, and with great suddenness. That argues against manual assault. Besides, no human hand is big enough to reach clear round his neck—he must have worn a sixteen collar—and even if it were, there isn't any thumb mark here."

He nodded gloomily, almost sullenly. "You said it. Know what it reminds me of?"

"I'll bite."

"Something I saw when I was hoppin' ambulances at Bellevue. Circus was playin' the Garden and a roustabout got in a tangle with one of the big apes. It throttled him."

"So?" I raised my brows. "Where's the connection?"

"Right here. These livid patches on this feller and the ones on that poor cuss we took down to the morgue are just alike. Charlie Norris had us all down to the mortuary when he performed the autopsy on that circus man and showed us the characteristic marks of an ape's hand contrasted with a man's. He was particular to point out how a man grasps something, using his thumb as a fulcrum, while the great apes, with the exception of the chimpanzee, make no use of the thumb, but use the fin-

gers only in their grasp. Look here—" he pointed to the large square livid mark —"this would be the bruise left by the heel of the hand, and these—" he indicated the long, circling lines about the dead man's neck—"would be the finger-marks. That's just the way the bruises showed on that man at the Bellevue Morgue."

"Snap out of it!" I almost shook him in my irritation. "Here's one time when observed phenomena don't amount to proof. It seemed fantastic enough to find a cylinder of concentrated carbon monoxide in the car, with you chaps and Miss Watrous almost dead of CO poisoning, but to lug in a gorilla or orang-utan to throttle our would-be murderer before he had a chance to slip his gas mask on—Poe never thought up anything as wild as that."

"Okay. Have it your own way," he grumbled, "but—"

A grunt from Amberson deflected our attention from the corpse. "Take a look at this, you fellers," he commanded, holding out the sheaf of papers he had taken from the inside pocket of the dead man's blouse. "Ever see a finer set-up?"

The first paper was a pass from G-2 declaring the bearer might circulate where he chose inside our lines in uniform or plain clothes; he was not to be delayed; all railroad transportation officers were directed to give him every preference. Intelligence work.

The next identified him as Captain Albert Parker Tuckerman, infantry unassigned, on leave with special permission to visit the Paris area. Next were travel orders to Brest, Saint-Nazaire, Treves, Coblenz—each issued in a different name. Last, but far from least, was a complete list of our personnel at provost marshal's offices, intelligence and liaison officers, and orders for troop movements and concentrations in occupied Germany.

Weinberg pursed his lips and gave a soundless whistle. "Looks as if you've caught a fish here, sir. Who was he; any idea?"

"Nope," Amberson shook his head, "but I'll bet G-2 will be glad to see his photograph. There's a Jerry undercover man been raisin' merry hell with our arrangements; shouldn't wonder if he's here—" he jerked a thumb toward the still form stretched on the railway seat. "Just for once I'm grateful to that big-mouthed apKern. When he began to sound off about carrying confidential papers we all knew it was for Miss Watrous' benefit, but this bird fell for it. He must have traveled with that can of carbon monoxide and gas mask all ready for such emergencies. Maybe that'll account for some of the mysterious disappearances of papers from our offices. Anyway, it's fairly obvious that when we fell asleep he opened up his little bag o' tricks and was about to swipe apKern's dispatches when he got a whiff o' his own poison and passed out."

"But he didn't die that way—" Weinberg began.

"Take it easy, buddy," I admonished as I administered a none too gentle nudge with my field boot. "Let the board of inquiry decide how he died. Don't go broadcastin' that gorilla-stuff. Want to be slapped in the booby-hatch before you have a chance to sop a drink up at Treves?"

Weinberg lit a cigarette and took a thoughtful puff. "I don't know how the big lug died," he finally admitted. "Maybe he woke up and apKern talked him to death. But there's something dam' funny about it, just the same."

"How?" Amberson demanded.

"Oh, nothing. It couldn't have any bearing on the case."

"Everything has bearing on a case like this," the major answered with the cocksureness of the professional policeman. "What was it?"

"Well, when I went to give first aid to Miss Watrous I noticed that her left puttee

was unfastened and her shoe untied and only partly laced."

"Humph. No, I guess that hasn't any bearing on our case. I know just how she must have felt," agreed Amberson. "When I first came in the service I almost died with my puttees. Even now I sleep better sitting up when I can loosen 'em and unknot my shoes.

LIFE was pleasant, even gay, at Treves. There was much influenza, but after the exertions of field and base hospitals with their never-ending lines of surgical emergencies we found routine visitation and dedication of bed-patients almost a vacation. My quarters in the Blumenstrasse were comfortable, for a huge white porcelain stove drove back the raw damp cold, and the great bed of carved mahogany was equipped with double feather mattresses. In intervals between duty I saw the town. visited the Porta Nigra, the great fortified gate past which the life of Treves had flowed since Roman days, the brick basilica and the vast amphitheatre where Constantine had butchered captives or turned them loose to be torn by wild beasts for the amusement of the populace.

In the evening there was always plenty of amusement, dances, dinners or the opera where fat German tenors serenaded equally fat German sopranos with a zest that defied years and embonpoint.

Fedocia Watrous was a favorite everywhere, pouring tea at the officers' club, dining at headquarters, or serving buns and coffee to the men. Half the younger officers were wild about her, but it took apKern to put their disappointment into words. "Hang it, Carmichael," he complained, "the gal ain't human! She has you stopped before you get a chance to get cranked up. She's—she's like a nun. You know—just a mere spiritual entity, with her body already in the grave and only her soul remaining, and that swathed in a religious habit. You don't fall in love with a nun any more than you do with a ghost, but—" he made a gesture of futility as he reached for the brandy to replenish his drink—"there it is! I'd go for her in a big way if she'd give me a break, or even act as if she knew that I'm around."

I knew just what he meant. She had an odd trick—or an unconsciously conditioned reflex—of fading out of the real world at times and becoming entirely oblivious of her surroundings. Her power to dismiss the world from her consciousness, apparently to notice nothing about her, or even completely to forget the existence of the person talking to her, was extremely disconcerting to young men with matrimonial designs, and utterly absorbing to a doctor with a leaning toward psychiatry.

THEN came the influenza epidemic of '19. Ambulances strained and stalled with their loads of the stricken, hospitals were bulging with fresh cases till we set beds in the corridors and cellars and still required room for more cots. The only reason that we worked no longer was that no day could be stretched to yield a twenty-fifth hour. Our patients died like flies; at first that hurt us, for it's no easier for a doctor than a layman to stand by and watch men die, but presently we grew used to it.

I had a patient in 19-B, an infantry lieutenant named Ten Eyck, and from the first I knew his case was hopeless. He fought for life with a tenacity that almost startled me. "I have to get well, Doctor—" civilian titles were the rule among civilian soldiers—he told me. "There's a girl back home I've got to see—"

"Of course, you will, son," I soothed him. "You're getting stronger all the time. Like me to write a letter to her for you?" I hadn't time to act as secretary to a dying man, but somehow I determined to snatch it.

"I'd be obliged if you would, sir. I've

loved her since I was that high—" He tried to raise one hand to indicate a Lilliputian stature, found he lacked the strength for it, and lay back, panting, on his pillow. "Her father was a Presbyterian minister and her mother died when she was born."

"Take it easy, Lieutenant," I counseled. "Just tell me what you'd like to say to her; don't waste strength on biographies."

"But you ought to know this, sir. It explains why I love her so. You see, 'way back in 1894 her folks went out to Africa as missionaries, and she was born there. Their station was in western equitorial Africa, the gorilla country. One day while her mother was walking in the garden a great big buck gorilla came charging from the jungle. Hunters had killed his mate and he was wild with grief and rage. He snatched her up and made off to the forest, but he didn't hurt her. They found her next day in the hammock he'd made for his dead mate, quite mad from fright, but physically unharmed.

"Her baby was born the next week, and she died in childbed."

As far as I could see there wasn't any connection between the tragedy of the missionary's wife and this young man's love for his daughter, but he seemed to think there was. "He quit the mission field and came back to Philadelphia," he continued in a whisper. "They lived next door to us and Mother sort o' raised her. She was in our house as much as in her own, I guess, and we grew up together. Funny thing about her, though, she'd never go in wadin' with me. When we'd be out in the country she'd go walkin' in the woods or fields, but never took her shoes an' stockings off. Seemed to be sort o' touchy about her feet, though they were small and pretty, and—"

"Better tell me what you'd like to say, son," I advised. It didn't need a doctor's training to see that his sands were running low. "If you'll tell me—"

"Last thing she said when I went off to camp was, 'I'll be waitin', Tommy,'" he continued in a husky whisper. "Can't let her down when she said that, can I, Doc? Got to get well and go back to her. You see that, don't you?"

"Of course," I nodded. "Sure, son, I see perfectly. Now, if you'll just give me her name and address—"

The signs were bad. When I'd come in he had been running a high temperature, now there was a wreath of sweat-drops on his brow beneath the hair-line and his lips were almost lead-colored. I had to bend to catch his answer; even then it hardly reached me, for his voice was faint and thick as if his throat were packed with cotton-wool: "Fe—Fedocia Watrous, six-sixteen Spring—" The pitifully-forced words stopped, not abruptly, but with a slowly sinking faintness, like a voice heard on the radio when the current is shut off with a slow turn.

"Fedocia Watrous!" I repeated. "Why, she's right here in Treves. I'll get her for you in an hour—Nurse!" There was no time for conversation now, and I pressed the buzzar frantically. "Nurse!" Where the devil was that dam' girl, flirting with those convalescent aviators down the hall?

"Strychnine in a hypo hurry!" I commanded when the girl came stumbling in her haste. "If you'd pay more attention to your duties—" It wasn't fair. She'd been on duty since the night before and there were heavy violet circles underneath her eyes, but raw nerves make raw words, and heaven knew our nerves were all rasped raw. "Never mind," I added as she turned reproachful eyes on me. "Never mind the hypo, Nurse. Call the head orderly and tell him to bring the wheel-cot and change the linen on this bed. We've got another vacancy."

"Oh!" her sob was hard and ugly, like a smothered cry. "Another?"

"Another," I repeated as I drew the sheet across the dead boy's face. I'd nailed

another lie. Familiarity doesn't breed contempt. Not for death, anyway.

I was in that state of bodily exhaustion that gives a curiously deceptive sense of brightness of mind as I walked down the corridor from B-19. Nine years could make a lot of changes, but at the end I'd recognized Lieutenant Thomas Ten Eyck as surely as if I'd known him always. As I glanced through the grimy window to the cheerless courtyard where the February wind was busy chasing little whirls of snow across the red-brick tiles it seemed to me that I could look clear down the vista of the years and straight across the ocean to a sun-washed summer afternoon in Fairmount Park where a boy and girl were idling by the monkey cage and he was telling her, "I bet you couldn't do it," as a little monkey fed itself from its hind foot.

She'd almost fainted at his none too witty sally. Why? Did it bring up tragic thoughts of her mother? Hardly. She'd not been fearful of the monkey's. Seeing them had raised no phobia. Not until he called attention to the monkey's feeding, and expressed doubt she could duplicate it, did she wilt. Why? The question rose again, insistently, but found no answer.

Funny thing about life, I reflected. I had seen them for a possible three minutes on that day nine years ago. Then our lives had crossed again in Germany. She was somewhere in the city now, unmindful of his presence; he was lying in his bed back there with a sheet across his face, past all hopes and all defeats, quits with destiny before his manhood fairly started.

"CARMICHAEL, for Gawd's sake, give me a snort!" Weinberg came stamping into my quarters, flakes of February snow adhering to the collar of his sheepskin, a drawn and almost haunted look on his face.

"Surest thing in Germany," I returned as I broke out brandy, soda water and glasses. "Been wishin' I had someone here to drink with me."

He splashed about three ounces of raw cognac in the tumbler and drained it almost at a gulp. His hand had trembled when it put the drink to his lips, but in a moment it grew steady, which to anyone who knows drinking and drinking men, is a bad sign.

"Easy on, old top," I cautioned as he poured a second, even larger, drink. "You know you're welcome to it, but—"

I stopped my protest as I looked into his eyes.

There was no trace of the brilliant, carefree, wise-cracking young medico whose steadiness of hand and eye and uncanny ability as an orthopedist were the talk of all who knew him. Instead, his countenance was serious with what Carlyle once called "the awful, deadly earnestness of the Hebrew."

"I saw it again tonight," he told me, and despite the warming glow of the brandy he shivered.

"Saw what?"

"Remember the lividities on that bloke's neck—the one we found dead on the train from Paris?"

"The one you said looked as if he'd been throttled by a gorilla?"

He nodded, taking a long sip of brandy. "Check."

"Where?"

"Over at the mortuary. I'd come off duty and was washing up in the basement when young Himiston—you know him, Cornell '16; came over with the last replacement from the draft—called me over to a wheel-cot standing by the entrance to the autopsy room. 'Ever see anything like this, Captain?' he asked, drawing back the sheet from a body. 'Nobody can figure it; they found him in the hall outside N-18, the women's ward, dead as a herring, with his head turned almost all the

way around—just as if something had wrung his neck like a chicken's.'

"There it was, so help me, Carmichael, point for point and line for line, the same bruise-pattern as the one you saw on the train from Paris, and I'd seen once before at Bellevue Mortuary."

"What's the history?" I demanded as I helped myself to cognac. Somehow I, too, was beginning to feel chilly, despite the fierce heat from the porcelain stove.

"Here it is—" He spread his fingers fanwise and checked the items off. "There's a crowd of nurses—five or six of 'em—laid up with the flu in N-18. Next door, in a semi-private which happens to be private now because the other inmate died this afternoon, is Miss Watrous. Just down the corridor, in M-40, is Amberson, in dry-dock with a smashed collar-bone, and next to him, in 41, is apKern with the flu. Notice anything?"

"Three of the five people who were in the compartment when the German spy was throttled were within a hundred feet or so of the spot where, presumably, this man was killed—again presumably—in the same way."

"Right. Right as a rabbit. This fellow was a Polack from Pennsylvania, miner or something; big as a horse and strong as a bull. Influenza convalescent who'd gone raving-wild on some whiskey someone smuggled into the first floor wards. Crazy as a chinch-bug, and with a killing streak on him.

He'd knocked an orderly out cold and gone wandering through the hospital. While they were looking for him on the ground floor he was running up and down the second-story corridors, peeking into rooms and wards and scaring all the patients senseless. Finally he reached the nurses' ward."

"And—" I prompted as he fell silent.

"'And' is right," he answered finally. "He came barging into the ward, snatched the blankets off the first bed, and lay down in it. When the patient in it tried to get out he grabbed her.

"No," he answered the unspoken question in my eyes, "he might have thought about that later; right then he was intent on murder and destruction. He took her by the hair with one hand and clutched her throat in the other, and was about to break her neck when something—get this, they're all agreed on it—something rushed in from the corridor, snatched him by the neck and dragged him out."

"Something? What was it?" I asked fatuously.

"That's just what nobody knows. The only light in N-18 was a candle, no electric bulbs in there, for it used to be a storeroom and was never wired. When the big Bohunk fanned the bedclothes back he blew the candle out, so all the light they had was what came through the window from the courtyard. The girls were all too weak to fight him, but not too weak to yell, and they were setting up an awful clamor when It rushed in.

"Keep your blouse on, can't you?" he demanded irritably as I leaned forward with another question. "I'm telling you everything I know. When I say 'It' I'm as near to being specific as anybody. Something—and no two of 'em are agreed on what it was—came crashing in from the hallway and grabbed the murdering drunkard by the neck, hustled him out and killed him, just as something we don't know about did in that Jerry secret agent on the train from Paris."

"Some of the girls declare it looked like a great white ape, one thinks it was a spider bigger than a man, but all agree it handled that six-footer as if he'd been a baby.

"Now—" he tapped me on the knee in sober emphasis— "I'm not saying there's any connection between the fact that some of those who were with us on the Paris train were within striking distance of N-18

tonight, but I do say it gives us something to think about."

"I'm afraid you're goin' off the deep end, Alvin," I told him. "Amberson's laid up with a smashed clavicle. That lets him out. A man in that condition can't wash his own face, let alone go tearing men to pieces. apKern's a fairly husky lad, but not quite up to wringing Pennsylvania miners' necks. As for Miss Watrous—poor kid, she's got a bad break coming when I tell her about him."

"About him? Who?"

"Young Tom Ten Eyck. I didn't realize they'd brought her into hospital that day. She must have been checked in before he died."

"Who in the name of Caesar's nightshirt was this Tom Ten Eyck?"

I told him how the lad died, then how I'd seen him and Fedocia years before in Fairmount Park. "Funny, isn't it?" I ended.

"Not very," he replied somberly. "Maybe medicine has been too cock-sure about what can and what can't happen all these years."

"How d'ye mean?"

He shrugged into his sheep-lined mackinaw and held his hand out. "Thanks for the drink, Pat. If I should tell you what I'm thinking you'd say I'm crazy as a coot. Maybe I am, at that. Good-night."

FOR some inexplicable reason a wave of intestinal disorders swept across our section of the Army of Occupation, and the incidence of appendicitis mounted steadily. I'd performed three appendectomies that evening, two cases had reached paraappendicitic stages, and I was thoroughly depressed, dispirited and exhausted by the time the cold and dismal twilight darkened into colder night. The courtyard was filled with sad, muddy puddles, relics of the melting snow, a fine mist, half sleet, blew against my cheeks, everywhere was humid cold as I walked back and forth and drew great gulps of frosty air into my lungs. It seemed to me I'd never get the taint of ether out of my nostrils and throat.

"Bad night, sir, ain't it?" asked the sentry chattily as I paused to do a right about at the end of the quadrangle. "'Minds me o' th' waterfront down by th' Brooklyn Bridge. 'Member how th' mists comes up from th' Bay when th' wind is changin'—my Gawd, sir, what's that?"

He was looking toward the high brick wall that loomed against the drizzle-darkened night across the courtyard, dark and sinister as the wall of some old haunted castle, and his face was set in a stiff, frozen mask of terror. His eyes were fixed, intense, it seemed as if the very substance of his soul was pouring from them as he looked. "*Mater purissima, refugium peccatorum—*" I heard him mumble between chattering teeth, searching memory for the half-forgotten prayers learned at parochial school—"*Mater salvatoris—*"

My eyes caught the object of his fascinated gaze, and I felt my throat close with a quick fear while something terrible and numbing-cold seemed clutching at my stomach.

Against the blackness of the fog-soaked wall a form—a human form—was moving, not grip by slow and painful grip as it clung to irregularities worn in the masonry by stress of years and weather, but with an almost effortless progress, *head-downward*, like a monstrous lizard!

"Good Lord, it can't be—" I began, but his voice, high-pitched, honed sharp by hysteria, drowned my words out.

"I'll get it, Captain; ghost or devil, I'll get it—"

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" I heard Weinberg's frantic cry as he dashed out into the courtyard. "Don't fire, I tell you—it's—"

The clatter of the sentry's automatic cut across and blotted out his frenzied warn-

ing. The pistol was a captured German job, a ten-shot Luger issued to our Medical Department men as sidearms for patrol work. It operated like a miniature machine gun and with the trigger held back spewed its whole load in a stream of shots. Whether he was naturally a marksman or whether fear lent accuracy to his hand, or if it were an accident I don't know. I do know that his shots all seemed to take effect; I saw the crawling lizard-thing pause in its downward course, hang clinging to the wall a moment, as if it clutched the wet, cold, slippery bricks with a spasmotic grasp, then suddenly go limp and hurtle to the half-hard lush that lay upon the courtyard tiles, quiver reflexively a moment, then lie still.

"You fool, you damned, fat-headed, superstitious fool!" Weinberg fairly shrieked at the sentry. "I'll have you up before a general court for this—oh, hell, what's the use?"

He was crying as he raced across the quadrangle with me at his heels. The tears were streaming down his cheeks, mingling with the drizzling rain that blew into his face. "Help me with her, Pat," he begged as he fell to his knees beside the still body. "Help me carry her inside. Maybe it's not too late—"

I bent to help him, then, despite myself, drew back. Clothed in outing flannel pajamas, drenched with blood that spurted from at least ten wounds, and obviously dead, Fedocia Watrous lay, a huddled, mangled, bullet-riddled corpse, before us on the rain-diluted snow.

THE liquor that the pharmacist broke out at Weinberg's order was far from palatable, but it was "Whiskey, U.S.P.," which meant it was one hundred proof—fifty percent grain alcohol—and that was what we needed right then.

"I was afraid of this," he told me as he gulped a second potion down. "She'd been delirious all day, and I asked that they have a nurse with her every minute. I s'pose the girl had left to get her tray, or something, though, and that was when it happened. The moment she was free from surveillance she went for the window—"

"What in heaven's name are you driving at, Al?" I broke in. "What's Fedocia's being in delirium got to do with—"

"Sorry," he apologized. "I hadn't told you what it was I suspected.

"Remember the other night at your quarters I told you I thought medical opinion and theories were due for overhauling?"

"Yes, but—"

"Never mind the buts, old man. Ever since we found that Jerry secret agent throttled in our railway coach I'd puzzled over his bruises. The evidence all pointed to a great ape's having throttled him, but that was palpably absurd. I'd found Fedocia's putt and shoe unfastened, but that could have no bearing on the case—I thought. Then the other night you told me what Ten Eyck had said before he died—Fedocia's mother had been frightened into madness by a gorilla just before she had her baby; Fedocia never showed her feet to anyone; seemed sensitive about them; you saw her almost faint when young Ten Eyck joked about her ability to feed herself with her feet. Remember?

"Yes, of course; but—"

"Hold hard, feller; let me finish. Nearly everybody's heard—and most laymen believe—stories of pre-natal influence; that if a mother's frightened by an animal her baby's likely to be marked with some characteristic of the beast. A mother terrified by a vicious dog, for instance, may give birth to a dog-faced child; or one who's been chased by a bull may bear a child with vestiges of horns upon its head—"

"What *are* you building up to?" I demanded. "Those old wives' tales of prenatal influence have been discredited a century and more. Davenport in his *Heredity*

in Relation to Eugenics states clearly that—"

"Sure," he broke in sarcastically, "and you can find plenty o' people who believe that Bacon wrote Shakespeare, and just as many others who'll tell you that Bacon laid an egg, but let me tell you something, Pat Carmichael:

Fedocia Watrous killed that German spy and saved us all from asphyxiation. She must have wakened when he got his gas-kit out and saw that he was up to—remember you told me how her eyes seemed to glow in the dark? She was probably better able to see in dim lights than we are, just as animals can. So she whipped her shoe and puttee off and killed him with a single grasp of her foot, but the gas got her before she'd quite finished redressing, so—"

"Al, you're drunk or crazy; maybe both!" I interrupted. "How in blazes could she have throttled him with her foot? I suppose you'll tell me next she killed that crazy miner and saved those nurses—"

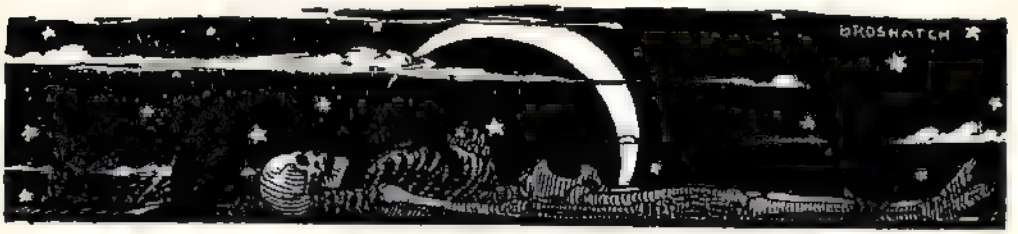
"Of course, she did," he broke in almost savagely. "Come here—" Seizing me by the cuff he led me up the stairs and down the almost lightless corridor to the room where they had laid her.

She was so peaceful, so lovely, lying in her white cot with the blankets drawn up cozily about her throat that though I'd seen her die I had to look a second time to make sure that I did not see the flutter of her bosom underneath the coverlet. The rain had stopped some time before, and now an early-morning beam of sunshine slanted through the window. But for Fedocia, as for the boy who'd loved her since their childhood, the night had come.

"Look here, Pat," commanded Weinberg, "look and tell me if those 'old wives' tales' have been completely discredited." He drew the covers almost reverently from the foot of the cot.

Her lovely legs were shaped as graciously as any ever sculptured by the master-craftsmen of old Greece, her ankles were as sharply turned and clean-cut as a thoroughbred race horse's, but her feet—"Good heavens!" I ejaculated as I looked.

They were like hands; like powerfully-sinewed hands with scarcely any palms, but with fingers of abnormal length and thickness. The thumbs—or great toes—were mere vestigial stumps, and over all was thick, lead-colored *hide*, coarse and tough and callous as the skin that covers a gorilla's foot.



"She'll be like me — and she'll stay here forever!"

Unhallowed Holiday

By O. M. CABRAL

Unhallowed, earthbound, he sought another who might be his playmate for Eternity; sought—and found. . . .

THE front door slammed with a gusty bang, and Julia Lathrop jumped nervously, dropping the book she had been reading. From the hallway came the sound of a child's clear treble, then light, running feet.

"Virginia!" Julia called, trying to suppress the strange quaver in her voice, the sudden hard beating of her heart. "That you—Gin?"

" 'Course it's me, mother!" And Gin came into the room.

The child was thin like a growing reed, awkwardly graceful and tall for her nine years. She was proud of her missing front tooth and her two taffy-colored braids which were still too short, really, to ever stay braided. Julia noted the look of luminous happiness on the child's delicate face, the wind-ruffled hair like a fine, spun web, the too-bright eyes that had of late become a little secret and remote.

"*Must* you, darling, slam the door when you come in?"

"It wasn't me," Gin protested, a trifle sulkily.

"Virginia!"

"Well, but it *wasn't*. It was Tommy, really. He came in when I did, but he ran right out again—"

Julia's lips tightened a little as she studied the child's face. She could discern nothing but candor there. Virginia's hurt air of being misunderstood seemed real enough.

"Virginia—you're not to tell that story again, do you hear? It's silly—just something you made up. There isn't any such person, and you know it! I know it's just a game, but it's a wicked one, and—"

Virginia stamped her foot. Her childish face contorted with grief and anger. Two huge tears squeezed out of her stricken eyes and worked their way down her smooth apple cheeks.

"It isn't!" she sobbed. "It isn't just a story! It's true—every bit! Tommy's real! We—we played tag in the orchard before we came in! He isn't a fib, I didn't make anything up, I *didn't!*

Frightened, Julia jumped up and crossed the room in quick strides. She grasped the thin, heaving shoulders and looked down into Gin's tearful, accusing face. Trying to mask the unsteadiness in her voice, she spoke casually:

"Don't do that, Ginny—don't cry. Mother didn't mean anything bad. Here's a hankie—that's better, isn't it?" Her fingers flew, smoothing the fine, taffy-colored hair. "You must have been playing tag with the wind! Look—you've lost a ribbon and torn your skirt."

"Tommy runs faster than me," said the child, more calmly. "I chased him but he got away in the briar patch. I guess that's how I tore my new dress."

Suddenly Julia swept the taffy-colored head close. She didn't want Gin to see her face just then.

"Seems to me," Julia said gaily, "this Tommy of yours is *always* running away. He must be quicker than a rabbit. Is that why I've never seen him?"

"Oh, Mother! He's *scared* of people!"

"Yes? And why?"

"Because—well, because."

The childish voice trailed off. The room was very quiet. Julia stiffened, staring fixedly over Gin's bowed head—staring through the wide-open casement windows, at the clean, warm, yellow afternoon sunlight.

Beyond the white sashes were the massed blooms of the hollyhocks, trim, precise and sane. Beyond the flower-bed she could see a shaven slope of lawn, and still further away the ripe grass uncut at the foot of the old orchard.

The orchard, she thought frantically—forcing herself to think—was frightfully run-down. The twisted, wind-tortured trees assumed such grotesque shapes at night. Those dead husks should have been cut down long ago—they were unsightly, and spoiled the place. The orchard field itself was grown over with lank weeds and sparse wild hay that had seeded itself on the wind. She watched how the wind wove a patch through the tall grass of the orchard field—invisible feet retreating from the edge of the lawn back toward the shadows of the twisted apple-trees.

She watched intently how the yellow grass rippled at the base of a gnarled trunk,

and a big, sooty crow suddenly flapped from a dead limb, raucously crying.

AT FIRST, Julia had been crazy about the place. The sprawling white house on a hilltop had seemed exactly what they were looking for. The land itself was considerably run-down, but for that reason rather wild, very charmingly diversified, and not really like a farm at all.

Cliff Lathrop had joked to their friends about their recently-acquired thirty-acre "estate." It had, he proudly boasted, a hill, a gully, a house, a red barn, a private road, an orchard (no good), a strip of woods (second growth), and a private, spring-fed lake.

Yes, the pond (really a lake to their city-bred eyes) had just about clinched the sale. It lay in a hollow behind the house and at the base of the hill—far enough away so that they were not really troubled with mosquitoes that must have bred in the strip of swamp that surrounded the pond.

The swamp didn't matter, for it was not unsightly. Thick rhododendron grew there, a mass of pink bloom in the late spring. And there were trees and ferns and purple iris. In the muddy shallows of the water grew thin, tall sedge-grass, water-lilies and graceful cat-tails. A shallow ridge of cleared, dry ground—maybe once an old wagon-road—led from the house itself down through the woods to a small floating dock built by some previous owner.

They had planned such a grand summer, but Julia was beginning, now, to hate the place. Even in the bright sunlight she would remember suddenly, and shiver—wondering if, after all, the place were really some sort of trap in which, slowly, sanity slipped away until at last you came to accept as a matter of course that which was beyond reason or credibility.

Virginia . . .

What was happening—what in heaven's name was wrong with the child? From the first, just as they had hoped, she had blossomed happily in the clean country air—frolicked and played from dawn to dusk. But Julia, watchful and puzzled, alert to every nuance of strangeness in Gin's behavior, could no longer deny to herself that there was something weirdly wrong with the child. For either Gin had become obsessed with some vast, elaborate and very complicated kind of lying, or else—

But the alternative she refused, steadfastly, to permit herself to believe, even yet.

"But why be upset?" Cliff asked innocently when, at last, Julia brought herself to speak to him about Gin's lying. "Kid's are always making up things—it's only harmless imagination working overtime."

"It isn't—exactly," Julia said slowly, choosing her words with a certain amount of care. "And you musn't scold her about it—it has the strangest effect. She gets upset, terribly unnerved. And it frightens me because—well, because I can see that she really *believes* in this imaginary playmate. Oh, you don't know what it's been like! It frightens me—but I didn't want to say anything to you until I was really *sure!*"

Cliff's mouth opened. He looked at his wife curiously.

"Sure of what? Of her belief, you mean? Well, suppose she *does* believe, sort of, in this fictitious Tommy? Maybe she's lonely—maybe he's real, in a sort of way, to her childish imagination—you know, the way people in fairy-tales were real to her, when she was younger? It's just a fad, and she'll outgrow it—maybe get tired of the game when she sees we don't take it very seriously. Seems to me that's the thing to do—tease her out of it, not pull a long face and get all wrought up about something that doesn't even exist—"

But at dinner Cliff's teasing brought unexpected results.

"Well, I hear Virginia's got a beau, eh,

Julia?" Cliff winked at his wife, ladling out a liberal helping of cold chicken for the child. "Young man name of Tommy—or so I've been told."

"Who told you?" Virginia's clear eyes clouded with suspicion. The bantering tone was evidently not to her liking.

"Who told me?" Cliff mocked his small daughter. "Well, now—is it a secret?"

"Yes," the child answered, with a scowling glance at her mother. "Sort of."

"Oh! Well, since the secret's out now, might we be told where the young gentleman lives? Seems to me he must do quite a cross-country hike to get out here from —well, wherever he's from."

"Oh, no!" The child's eyes, round and serious, were vaguely troubled. She hesitated, then as though under some dim necessity to make herself somehow understood, added quietly: "You wouldn't understand. He lives right nearby, you see—"

"Oh—some little boy staying at the Jackson farm?"

"Daddy, don't be silly! He lives right here on our place—in the pond. That's where he goes when he goes back *in* again —and I know 'cause I've seen him."

NOT again that evening did they make any reference to Gin's queer obsession—for otherwise the child behaved normally enough. Cliff played checkers with his small daughter and allowed her to beat him twice. After that, she went happily and triumphantly to bed.

Afterward, with the child asleep upstairs and the eerie moonlight glistening like frost on the clipped lawn, Julia abruptly drew the curtains over black panes.

"Heaven knows," said Cliff, amused, "we've no lack of privacy out here!"

"I—was just jittering," Julia confessed, unable to tell him just then how she had felt—that overpowering warning instinct of being watched, of *not* being alone. That the moonlit lawn had been bare, without blur or shadow, had only made the feeling somehow more terrible. "Cliff—what are we going to *do?*"

"About Gin? Well—I think she's lonely. You ought to send for one of her friends. Having some other kid around will chase this funny idea out of her head quick enough—what say?"

"I've thought of that," Julia told him. "I've already sent for Elsie. She's at the seashore now, but her mother wrote that she can come out and stay with Gin for a week or two. Oh, Cliff—you don't think there's something wrong? I mean, that she really sees things and—"

"Sick, you mean? Naw! She's healthy as a chipmunk, eats like a little pig and sleeps like a log. Say, old girl—did it ever occur to you the little tyke might, after all, be real? Up the road apiece, past Jackson's, there's a Lithuanian family—plenty of kids, all assorted ages. See, it must be one of them—"

"But, Cliff—three miles away? And besides—"

"What's three miles to a country kid? And you've never seen him because he's shy, see? But you act as if everything's natural and maybe he'll show up one morning with his paw out for a cookie!"

"Oh, Cliff! You think so?"

"Well, it *might* be so! Personally, I think we've been letting Gin's well-developed imagination run away with us—scaring ourselves, and without any reason. Now, look—there's only one sensible view to take: either he's a myth—and she'll outgrow it—or else there really is such a kid, but he's scared and over-shy. In either case, what's terrible about it?"

Cliff's reasoning steadied her, but only for a moment. For it was not only that Julia had watched the child racing across the lawn, followed apparently by none but the wind—gleefully shouting and calling to someone who never answered. It was not only that, for countless days now, Gin

had stubbornly persisted in her pretence that she was never really alone any more, that always an invisible child was at her side sharing in her childish games. There was more to it—an indefinite, but horrifying more—the one bit that Julia had held back from Cliff.

The day before she had seen the invisible playmate!

In bright sunlight, grass rippling gently as though some small animal stirred at its roots; a small, furtive sound, like the passage of a snake . . .

She, Julia, had crossed the lawn to call Gin for lunch. The child was sitting quietly under a big beach unbrella, making a crude, crayon sketch. Julia, smiling and looking down over Gin's shoulder, saw the scrawled likeness of a little boy in blue overalls. Gin had made a round, jack-o'-lantern face wreathed in an exaggerated grin. She had drawn in thick, stubby hair of a bright reddish-orange, and made the feet bare.

All at once Julia had been breathlessly conscious that there was someone *else*—someone standing in the orchard field just behind her—someone so dim and indistinct that when she turned her head it was as though colors flickered in the bright sunlight—wavered and vanished, like an abruptly dissolving mirage.

But for one breathless instant, for one heartbeat, she had seen something—*something*, surely! A wavering image, like the warping of air in heat-haze; the shadowy simulacrum of a small figure, standing in the ripe grass of the field.

It had seemed to Julia that the dissolving vision held color—blue tint, like faded overalls; a white shirt; a face unseen because it was surmounted by a big hat of yellow straw.

But afterward when, fingers pressed to her eyes, she tried to recall details that had been blurred—only shadowy suggestion—Julia wondered whether she had not merely imagined it. Heat and glaring sunlight distort vision. Perhaps she had simply projected, in vision, the blue-overalled boy of Gin's childish sketch—the drawing she had carefully labelled, in angular block letters: "TOMMY."

IT WAS with unutterable joy that Julia welcomed Elsie. The two children were of the same age, had been neighbors in the city. But curiously, Virginia exhibited no great enthusiasm at seeing her old playmate again. She was indifferent and ignored the other child.

"I won't stay here any more!" Elsie cried one morning, storming into the kitchen in tears. "I hate it here! I want to go home, please!"

"Oh, Elsie! What's the trouble? Did you and Gin quarrel again?"

"No, it's that ugly, horrible boy! He spoils everything! He—"

"Elsie!" Julia snatched the child's arm and swung her sharply toward her. "You saw him?"

" 'Course I saw him!" Elsie looked annoyed. "What do you mean? He comes every day but he won't come near us. He just stands there, watching, or follows us around—and it's scarey! I threw stones at him but they didn't hurt him. He just laughed and wouldn't go home. And Gin said she hates me. She said I scared him and now he won't come and play until I go back home!"

With Elsie's abrupt leaving the household became, to all appearances, normal again. Gin's impatience to be rid of the encumbering Elsie had been only too evident. Now the invisible other returned, to remain at her side throughout all of the long summer day. Gin laughed and prattled and was happy—and under the apparent light-hearted gaiety Julia was aware that horror hid and slowly uncoiled as day slid into day.

Even Cliff, now, began looking strangely at his small daughter. Once or twice Julia

found him staring intently through the window—saw him start nervously as she entered the room, grin sheepishly and turn away in an embarrassed fashion. It was he who urged that she take Gin to a specialist—and Julia acquiesced because she thought that a trip to the city might be good for the child.

The outcome was only what she might have expected. Gin's fantasies, said the doctor, did appear to be of a somewhat hallucinatory nature. But she, Julia, must not become alarmed. The child was in good health and should remain at home. She should not be punished, or forced in any way to relinquish her queer obsession. That might have harmful consequences. She, Julia, must be patient and endeavor to lead her back to reality by pretending, for the moment, to fall in with her make-believe. If Gin persisted in her obsession or if the hallucinations became more alarming they would probably have to resort to other measures.

Driving back, Julia reflected that doctors were all very well—but after all, she knew best. She had not told him one rather important thing—that Gin's fantasies had had reality—of a sort—for at least two other people. The one useful bit of advice that the doctor had given her only represented a decision that she had already made: that if she were to save her little girl from madness—or something even worse—she must do it, from now on, through love and guile. Gently and with patience, she must win the child away from—that hated other!

"I've seen the little devil," Cliff told her that evening, when they were alone again. Julia looked blank. "That kid!" he went on. "Gin's friend."

"Oh—he was here!"

"I'll say he was here! Last evening after you left, I caught the little tyke standing on the lawn, staring up at the windows. It wasn't sundown yet. There was plenty of light—I—he looked—"

"Quick—how did he look?"

Cliff frowned, swallowing a little. His eyes betrayed vague puzzlement. When he spoke again, he seemed to be choosing his words very carefully.

"Why, um—about like any little country boy. Blue patched overalls, bare feet, carried a frayed straw hat in his hands. Had a mop of red hair that seemed to need cutting. Maybe he had freckles, too. He'd come for Gin."

Julia laughed shakily.

"And that's all that happened?"

"Well—no. I went to the door and told him Gin had gone to the city. I'll be darned if his face didn't screw up with the most horrible look of hate. He shook his small fist at me and began crying."

"Oh, Cliff—did he threaten anything?"

"Him? Cliff scratched his head. Again, he seemed hesitant and a little sheepish—as though he were withholding something of which he felt uncertain, or a little ashamed. "Hell, he was only a little shaver, 'bout an inch taller than Gin I'd say. But there was something downright—well, pitiful about him some way. I got the idea then he thought Virginia'd gone away for good. So I went out on the porch and told him to quit sniveling—Gin would be back next day. And then—and then I took a few steps toward him. He turned around and ran out on the road. I followed, but when I got out to the road there wasn't a thing in sight. Still, when I went back to the house, I had the feeling that he hadn't ever left, at all.

"I think, somehow, he was hanging around all night—but that's nuts, isn't it? If I'd caught him, though, I'd have twisted his blamed ear off! And you know what? For the first time since we came out here I was sorry we didn't have a dog—a big, savage one!"

She could not foresee, now, a fierce tug-of-war for the possession of Gin. And as the struggle became more intensified,

that other became less cautious. As Julia had hoped, he emerged into the open at last. By great patience, she had managed to meet her antagonist face to face. It happened in this way:

Determined to be with Gin as much as possible from now on, she had suggested to the child that they pack a picnic basket, don bathing suits and spend the day at the pond. The suggestion seemed to startle Gin, yet please her.

"I dunno," she had objected uncertainly. "Tommy lives there. He—"

"He needn't be afraid of me, dear. Let him join us there. We can all spend the day together, then. Wouldn't that be nice? And if you'll just tell him he has nothing to fear from me, ever, and that I want to be friends—"

"I *would* love a swim," Gin had interrupted. "Down at the pond."

So presently they were sitting on the edge of the water-soaked float, dabbling bare feet in the bright water. It was a perfect summer day—hot and breathlessly still.

The water, blue in the pond's deep center, was brown in the shallows, dappled green with thick lily-pads. Virginia squealed happily as she lowered herself into the cold water, paddling at the edge of the float and showing off the new stroke her father had taught her.

All at once Julia was aware of someone standing in the muddy shallows just behind—someone stealthily watching, half-hidden by the thin, tall reeds. Very matter-of-factly, Julia turned her head, forcing herself to smile at the vision.

"Hello," she said calmly. "I'm glad you came at last. We've been waiting for you, Gin and I—and won't you come sit with us, out here?"

"Tommy!" Virginia crowed, holding to the edge of the float with one hand and waving frantically at the small, furtive figure in the reeds. "Tommy—c'm on! Look—I can swim a little on my back! Tommy—look!"

Like some small, cautious animal, the child very slowly left the reedy shallows where he was crouching and clambered up onto the bank. He shuffled across the bare strip of ground behind the float and stood there, to all appearances bashfully hesitant, grinning and squirming his bare toes in the dry earth.

There seemed nothing malevolent or remarkable about him now. He was small, Julia saw—indeed scarcely bigger than Gin herself. He seemed a bit thin or "spindling"—or else his faded, patched overalls and quaintly cut shirt were a little too big for him. This time, he carried his big straw hat, and she could see his face quite plainly—a grinning, engaging, freckled face surmounted by an unruly mop of red hair worn longish in the style of another time.

"Won't—won't you come near us?" Julia repeated her invitation a little faintly.

"No, ma'am," she heard the boy distinctly say—still grinning, eyes lowered as though in shy embarrassment, bare toes wriggling a pattern in the dry dust.

SUDDENLY Julia stood up. As though in pleading, she stretched out her hand—took three quick steps across the bobbing float toward the small, smiling child on the bank. He looked up, then—and the hatred in the blue eyes leaped out at her, stabbing.

"Child, why do you hate me? I wouldn't harm you—don't you know that? I only want to know—the truth. Why you are this way, and what I can do to help you be at peace—"

He was gone. Quite simply, he turned his back, stepped toward the reeds and melted into their midst—disappeared. The float rocked as Gin, dripping and clumsy, heaved herself out of the water.

"Why, he's gone!" Gin said reproach-

fully. "Oh, Mother—you drove him away again!"

It was hot—there was such a dazzle on the water. The sky was a tight, lacquered bowl. Everything was too still, too close, too bright. Julia clutched despairingly at Gin's small, dripping figure.

"What's the matter, Mommy?" The childish voice, full of puzzled concern, made Julia break into uncontrollable weeping. "Do you feel awful bad?"

"Bad," Julia sobbed, clutching Gin the harder. "Awfully bad! My poor little girl! Don't leave me, ever? You'll promise—stay close beside me?"

"'Course I'm right here, Mommy," Gin replied with childish dignity. "I'm sorry you hurt. Shall I dip some water out of the pond and put it on your head?"

"The pond—no! Let's go back—and don't ever go near it again! Keep away from it—you hear? It's—it's cursed!"

THE time had come, Julia felt, when she could no longer continue the unequal struggle. For now, with every passing hour, she was losing—Gin was slowly, but surely, slipping away from her. Only one alternative remained—to go away. And now she was forced to tell Cliff the truth.

"I been thinking about telling you for two days," Cliff unexpectedly informed her. "I know all about it. I've been inquiring around, ever since that afternoon when I—saw the kid." He looked at Julia bleakly. "Yeah—I really knew, then, something was wrong. It's the pond. Kid name of Tom Beaufield drowned there. Nine years old, he was—and that was seventy years ago."

"Seventy years," Julia repeated with dry lips. "Yes, I saw how it must have been—the old-fashioned haircut, the quaint shirt he wore."

"They never found him," Cliff went on. "The family moved away. Then a childless couple had the place—never noticed anything wrong. Then the old bachelor coot we bought the place from. It's my fault—I should have sent you and Gin away before. But now this clinches it. Start packing tomorrow."

"No—I won't even pack—at least, nothing but a small suitcase. We won't let Gin know until the last minute. Even then, maybe, we'd better pretend we're just going for the day. After we've gone you can board up the windows, see that our things get moved—"

Julia clapped her hand over her mouth, suppressing a scream.

"He was there!" she cried frantically, pointing to the wide-open window. "He heard us—every word!"

Cliff swore savagely. He leaped to the door and flung it wide open to the night. Across the lawn trotted a small shape, indistinctly seen by the light of a gibbous moon: a small lad in overalls who turned his head once, looking back, as if in derision. The instant Cliff stepped outside the door, he had vanished.

"Tomorrow!" Julia choked. "Tomorrow—if it isn't too late!"

They didn't leave because during the night Virginia complained of a burning in her throat. By morning she was running a high temperature and babbled deliriously. Alarmed, Julia had sent for a physician. But the man, a local practitioner, advised against moving the child until the fever died down.

"He's won, again!" Julia thought frantically. He doesn't want her to go away!"

But if Gin had to remain, confined, in that hateful house, she could still watch over her. Never would that hated other get near the child again. Already she had lost too much to him: Gin's sanity, and perhaps her life itself. That sinister, malignant child of the pond would never dare set foot over the threshold of the house so long as she, Julia, remained on guard—alert and vigilant to the shadowy enemy.

He came in the early afternoon. Quite simply, she knew that he was there, outside—and sure enough, when she went to the door, there stood the little overalled lad, straw hat set askew on his head, face up-tilted to the windows—Gin's window.

Julia walked out on the porch and, slowly, he lowered his head, staring full at her with bright blue eyes. He let her get within eight feet of him, then turned and walked away.

"Wait!" Julia cried sternly. "Stand where you are!"

He looked back over one shoulder. Under the shadow of the wide-brimmed hat she could see his eyes—sly, taunting. She could see the wide, mocking grin. It seemed to her that she had never known anything more malevolent, more horrifying than that child's face—thin, freckled and full of an unchildish wisdom, a knowledge of something beyond her, a power she was utterly unable to cope with.

"Stop!" she sobbed. "Please! Let me speak—just once?"

The other stopped. Julia considered flinging herself at him, but before she could move the lad solemnly raised his hand and beckoned to her. Then, looking back and again beckoning, he led her deliberately across the field and down the hillside toward the orchard.

"Why," cried Julia breathlessly when at last he permitted her to overtake him—"why are you doing this? What do you want?"

The lad lowered his eyes.

"I ain't a-gonta be alone," he muttered. "Not no more!" He looked up, and again she felt the stab of those blue, child's eyes. "You—you want to take her away, but she ain't a-goin'! She'll be like me—and she'll stay here forever!"

"You want her to be dead!" Julia screamed.

"She *is* dead," the lad answered. "Now, already. Go see."

THE house was empty. Gin, in her feverish delirium, must have left while the other lured Julia away. Distraught, weeping, she ran from room to room—mocked everywhere by the ringing echoes of her own voice.

The pond—was that what he had meant? Julia ran, stumbling down the rough trail swamped out through the patch of woods. She found Gin's two small shoes set side by side on the edge of the pond.

In response to her hysterical telephone call Cliff came home. Others, too, came to console her or join in the search. Close-mouthed men—strangers—tramped over the fields. The woods were combed. At night, as the search spread to the surrounding hills, there was the mournful baying of hounds.

"Get some sleep!" Cliff begged. "Maybe—there's still a chance—"

"No!" she sobbed. "Tell them not to look any more! She's in the pond—I know it!"

"They'll drag tomorrow," Cliff whispered haggardly. "We'll see."

Sometime in the night it began raining. Julia slept—but sleep was more terrible than waking reality. She plunged awake out of choking nightmare, to the drab grayness of earliest morning, and the sound of rain in the eaves gutters.

Downstairs Cliff slept huddled in a chair. He had not even taken off his shoes. The telephone had remained mute throughout the night. Julia tiptoed past him, down the hall and out the door.

It had rained heavily. A chill light glistened on every leaf and blade. Julia raised her face to the cold drops, feeling them soothe the terrible throb in her head, the ache in her eyes. She shut her eyes and walked blindly, feeling she could never get enough of the cold, pelting rain.

"Mommy!"

Her eyes flew open. Then she cried out and ran, sobbing brokenly, toward the

small figure standing uncertainly in the rain and the gray mist.

"Gin! I knew you'd come back! Oh, I knew you wouldn't leave me forever!"

"Don't come any closer, mommy!" Gin said. "Please!"

"Oh, Gin—let me hold you, just once!"

Gin shook her head.

"You can't, mommy. But I've got to go now. Tommy's waiting."

The child turned, and with elfin grace glided off into the rain. Julia ran—stumbling often as the wet grass tangled about her feet.

Gin ran too, fled barefooted, with the speed of the wind. In the eerie grayness she seemed part of the silver rain, part of the mist flowing along the tops of the wet grass. Her two short braids, drenched and dark, swung out behind her as she ran. In the milky opacity, another child, barefoot and overalled, raced to her side and joined hands with her.

"Children—wait! Please!" Julia shrieked.

She ran stumbling through the rain—and always the children, hands clasped, were just a little ahead. She lost them presently—and found, bewildered, that once againn she had ventured down the trail to the edge of the pond.

She turned away from the loathsome sight of the water, gray and pelted with raindrops. Weeping, blinded, she stumbled against a solid body—a pair of arms encircled her.

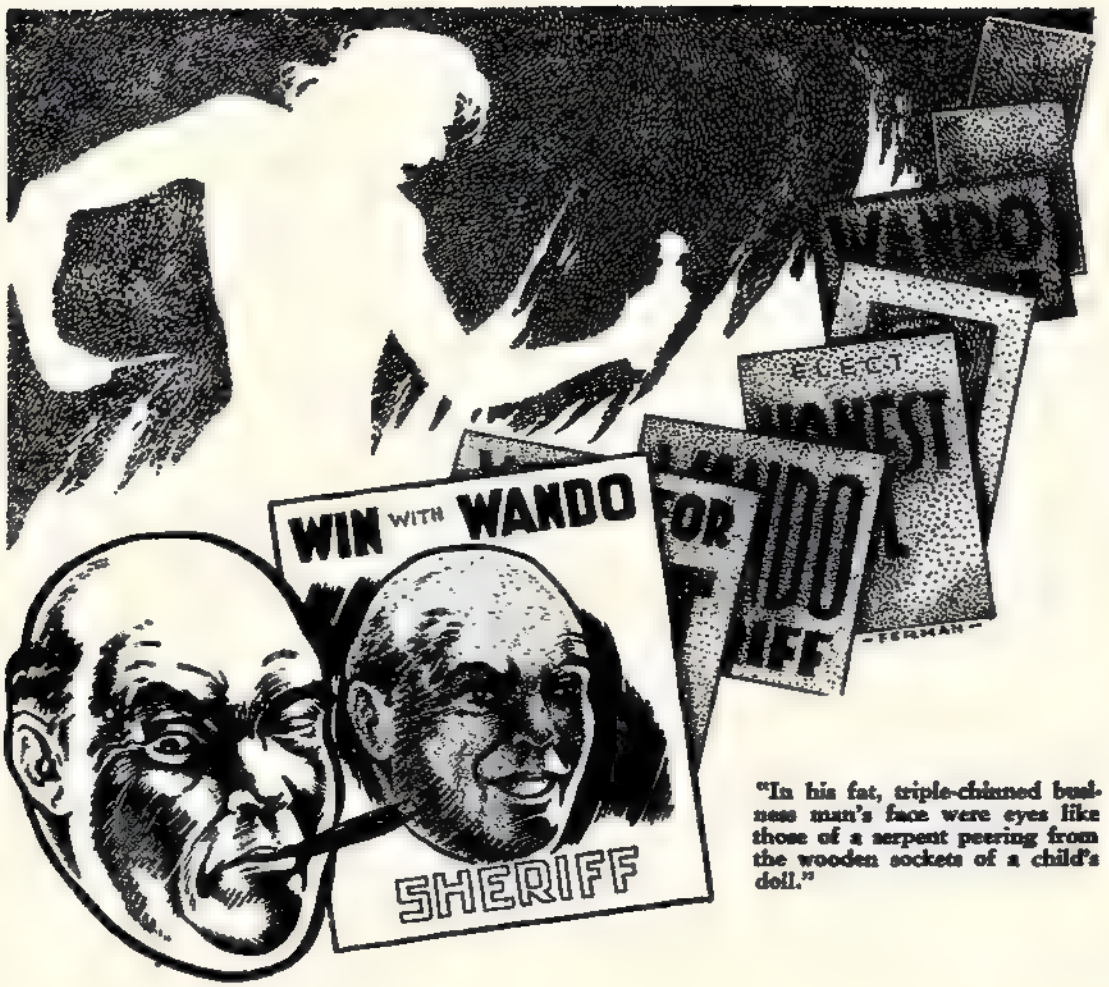
"Good God, Julia!" Cliff said hoarsely. "What are you trying to do? Come on back—quick now!"

"Virginia," Julia wept. "Earthbound. Unhallowed, for ever and ever."

"I heard you scream," said Cliff. "Saw you running across the field in the rain. I yelled and yelled, but you didn't stop."

Faintly and very far away, a dog began to bark. Julia twisted loose from Cliff's embrace—pointed to the wet earth. Cliff stiffened, his face slowly whitening.

Two sets of tracks—the fresh prints of small, bare feet, led into the pond. Even as they looked, they were already beginning to fade under the pelting drops of the cold, heavy rain.



"In his fat, triple-chinned business man's face were eyes like those of a serpent peering from the wooden sockets of a child's doll."

A Sorcerer Runs for Sheriff

By ROBERT BLOCH

The shadow of witchcraft falls across a modern American city. . . . How often had these same shadows flickered in witches' cots and wizards' dens?

ALLAN WANDO was one of the most popular men in town. He belonged to all the clubs, all the fraternal organizations, and all the civic movements. He attended more social gatherings than the rest of the Four Hundred put together. He knew everybody by their first name. He threw the most unusual parties in local society.

I hated his guts.

Perhaps that takes explaining. Maybe most men enjoy being slapped on the back in public places until their spines crack. Maybe most men like a glad-hander whose laugh splits their eardrums. I don't, that's all. And when Allan Wando got up in a banquet hall and trumpeted about "public service and helping one's fellow man," I could only remember that Mr. Wando paid the lowest wages in town to his factory workers, and was notorious for his political grafting in business.

Hence my dislike of Allan Wando's internal organs. I might as well go whole hog and admit that my hatred embraced Wando's external organs as well. He was too fat, and the smile that spread over his three chins was too oily.

When I saw that fat body and oily smile looming ahead of me in the corridors of an office-building, I wanted to dodge, but it was too late. Wando had seen me, and he was striding forward with one hand outthrust as though it were a bayonet poised to plunge into my stomach. That meant he wanted to shake hands. So I offered my fingers, and got them back in much worse shape after about thirty seconds of mauling.

"Well, well, well—good to see you—come on in—"

I mumbled that I had an appointment, that I just happened to be in the office-building on business, that I hadn't time—and before I was finished he had pushed me into his office.

Bewildering business. Wando evidently knew how I felt toward him, and reciprocated heartily. Why did he want a fly like myself in his spider's den?

But there I was, standing in his mahogany-panelled private room, with its big glass-topped desk, and the fluorescent lights gleaming upon the *"Service"* mottoes adorning the walls. And no sooner was the door closed behind me than Wando got to the point.

"I'm thinking of going into politics," he announced, portentously.

"Too bad for politics," was my thought, but I didn't say it.

"Yes, my friends about town have been urging me to do my duty as a citizen and run for public office."

It would be pretty hard for a guy like Wando to do both. I could see him running for office all right, but in order to do his duty as a citizen he'd have to drop dead. I didn't mention this thought, either, but waited for more revelations.

"So," smirked Allan Wando, "I've just about decided to announce my candidacy for sheriff in the coming election."

"Sheriff?" I echoed. "That's a surprise." It was, too. But at that, he might make a good one—if he could shoot off a gun as much as he could shoot off his mouth.

"I thought you'd like to know. Naturally, I expect my friends to support me in the race."

Probably he meant he'd be too drunk to stand alone.

"And when I saw you," concluded the would-be candidate, "I said to myself, there is just the man I need. How'd you like to write a few speeches for me? You're a writer, aren't you?"

"Well—" I began.

"You know, just knock together a few planks for my platform."

I'd much rather have knocked together a few planks for his gallows.

"Got to kid the public along, isn't it so? Just knock me out a few patriotic phrases, wave the flag a little, and I'll do the rest. I've got my financial backing all set, and the boys will be around passing out the beer—the usual campaign. So what do you say?"

What I had to say I was polite enough to say under my breath. Still, I needed an excuse to change the subject.

"Give me a while to think it over," I told him. My eyes roamed the room, seek-

ing an opening to switch the conversation.

I FOUND it.

On the table next to Allan Wando's desk was the most incongruous series of objects encountered in a business man's office.

Item number one, the cover of a horror story magazine. It showed the hands of a witch, sticking pins into a tiny wax doll.

Item number two, a newspaper clipping dealing with witchcraft.

Item number three—and here was the startling one—a dozen crude, tiny wax figures, standing in a row.

"Say," I blurted, "who are you trying to hoodoo?"

"Hoodoo?"

"Yes. Who are you planning to kill with those witch dolls?" I asked.

Allan Wando turned on his triple-chinned smile. "Come to my party tonight and find out. It's going to be a very unusual affair, I promise you."

I did, and—it was.

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"WHAT have we here?" Wando murmured in a solemn voice, holding up the magazine cover in a dim light.

The dozen guests seated around the big fireplace in his apartment craned forward to stare at the picture of the witch-hands stabbing pins into the wax mannikin. The shadows, Wando's deliberately assumed air of mystery, and several stiff highballs had put them into the mood.

"I'll tell you," said the host who gave the unusual parties, with the triumphant air of a host who knows damn well he gives unusual parties. "This is a picture of a poppet."

"Like Pinocchio?" asked Myrna Weber, giggling with all the girlishness of her forty years.

"No, not at all. This is not a puppet, but a *poppet*—a little doll made out of wax melted from church candles. In the old days the witches and wizards used to steal holy candles, melt them down, and fashion images of their enemies. Then, with appropriate ceremonies, they would plunge needles into the wax bodies—and the real persons represented by the wax figures would sicken and die. That was witchcraft."

"How interesting," simpered Myrna Weber, running one hand nervously through her blondined locks.

"I've heard of the superstition." It was Joe Adams who spoke. "Didn't William Seabrook mention it in his latest book?"

"I'm glad you mentioned him," Wando said. "Because we're coming to that point right now. Yes, he did speak of poppets in his book, and there are hundreds of treatises on sorcery and demonology that echo it. Savages practice those rites today—and they are supposed to work. Psychiatrists tell us that the power of suggestion can kill—if a man knows he's under a curse, he will sicken and die. But the wizards called it sympathetic magic, and it is known as Black Magic to us today."

"What about Seabrook?" persisted Joe Adams.

"I've got a clipping here referring to him." Wando held up the strip of paper I'd seen on his desk that afternoon.

"Here's a newspaper story that appeared a few months ago. A couple of people who read Seabrook's book on witchcraft wrote him letters asking whether it wouldn't be possible to 'wish' a victim to death. He had written in his volume about the power of thought — how circles of sorcerors, chanting together and concentrating their hatred on an enemy, could actually kill him. And these people, getting in touch with Seabrook, were asking for a formula to wish an enemy to death. He gave it to them."

"He did?" tittered Myra Weber. "But if he was serious—if he believed it—he'd be helping to commit a murder!"

"True." Allan Wando smiled mysteriously. "But he gave them a formula to chant and they got together in a party and all sat concentrating."

"What happened?" asked Myra.

"Nothing, yet. But it might—if they work it right."

"Just who was this person Seabrook and these people were so anxious to wish to death?" asked Joe Adams.

Wando smiled again. "Hitler," he said.

"Oh! Sounds screwy to me."

"Here's the newspaper clipping for proof."

"Damned interesting," I ventured. "But it didn't work."

"I've got a theory on that," said Wando. "Seabrook invented a sort of chant for these people to use, but there was nothing genuine about it. Just a gag. Now I propose that *we* try our hands at the game tonight—but with an *authentic* sorceror's weapon."

"What?"

"These."

Wando stepped aside. On the table behind him stood a dozen crude wax figures, roughly carved from candles. There was a pile of assorted cloth, some crepe hair, and a large box of pins and needles. We all got up and crowded around.

"Here are your poppets," said our host. "All made of genuine church candle wax. The game now is to take a figure, work the wax with your fingers until you get Hitler's face, put crepe hair on the doll, dress it according to your fancy, and then stick in the pins. Who knows, maybe it will work! At least it's better than Seabrook's idea, and we can all turn wizard for the evening."

So that's what Wando had up his sleeve! I could just see an account in tomorrow's paper—a nice facetious article, good publicity for a potential candidate!

But the others went for the idea in a big way. The women, led by Myra Weber, cackled about how it was, "Just too cute! Imagine making dolls again!" And the men, even practical Joe Adams, took up the figures and grinned sheepishly as they turned talk to the progress of European affairs.

"Stop!" Wando held up his hand. "This is serious business, my friends. Let's preserve an air of dignity. We might be on the verge of a big thing here—we cannot tell. We are about to attempt to kill a man. That is a serious experiment. It may be one that has a scientific basis—at least, it is actual magic. And if we were performing this deed in medieval Europe three centuries ago, we would be burned at the stake!"

Half-seriously he rambled on, but his words took hold. So did the dim lights, and the grotesque spectacle of a dozen men and women holding tiny waxen dolls in their hands.

"Come, to work!"

Wando had the big table in his parlor laid bare. We gathered about it in chairs, each with his cloth, his crepe hair, his pins. A picture magazine had been opened to a portrait of Hitler, and it lay face upwards to serve as a model.

We took our seats in a silence that was almost ominous. As I held my wax doll in my fingers, I was half-convinced that we *were* embarking on a murder plan in grim earnest.

Hands began to mould and soften the wax. Fingers began to knead features. Faces frowned in concentration, and the dim light masked the room where a spell was being born.

Myra Weber, hands continually running through her hair, was affected even more strongly than myself. She sat at my right, next to Wando, and she was almost trembling as she whispered to me.

"You're a writer, Bob. You know about these things. Do you really believe—?"

"Who can tell?" I answered. "For hundreds of years, millions of human beings *did* believe. Behind what we call witchcraft lies a very strange and deadly primitive lore; a secret knowledge that extends back to the primal eons. God shaped Adam out of clay and breathed the breath of life into him. And ever since, men have shaped clay of their own in an effort to take away that life from enemies. The poppets are known to all ages and all places; the secret wizardry is as old as mankind. And when men believe, and have always believed, in facts which are not disprovable by any known science, perhaps those facts are true."

"What you're telling me is that sticking pins in these dolls can kill, isn't it?" Myra whispered.

"I'm telling you I don't know," I said. And returned to my modelling.

Within a few moments virtually all of us had dolls. We began to dress them, cutting the tiny strips of cloth with shears; pasting crepe forelocks and mustaches on with glue.

There was a good deal of laughter over some of the results; many of the wax figures bore no resemblance to Hitler or anything human, for that matter.

But the laughter was forced. Get a man to do something, and after awhile he'll take the task seriously. When Wando called for silence again, the laughter ceased immediately. Faces resumed their grim contours. The shadows flickered across the wall—shadows of hands holding tiny dolls.

How often had those same shadows flickered in witches' cots, and wizard's den? How often had dolls of death danced in black mockery across the walls of secret and forbidden places?

I was not alone in the thought. Myra Weber's lips trembled. Even Joe Adams was scowling as he stared down at the wax visage of the dictator doll.

And Wando spoke.

"Now for the most important step of all," he announced. "I am going to pass around the needles. Be careful—they're very sharp. Sharp enough to reach the heart—if Hitler has a heart." He smiled. "I think it would be most—effective—if we all stabbed our dolls at once; and in the same place. I would suggest the head of our—victim."

Silence. Nobody dropped a pin, and nobody would have been able to hear it, for all of us were caught up in a mood of earnest concentration.

"Select your weapons."

The needles were passed. Sharp and shining, tiny daggers for the death of a doll.

"Let us all concentrate for a moment upon our enemy." Wando's voice was low. "Let us muster our hate, our desire. And then, when my hand flashes down, let yours flash too—and plunge the weapon into the brain of the tyrant."

Poetry—and from Wando! But it was all natural, in the midst of enchantment.

TWELVE wizards in a circle. Twelve dolls dressed for doom. Twelve sharp points to tear and slash.

Myra Weber shuddered. I did, too.

And we stared at our dolls in the silence, stared and hated, and the shadows were filled with the hate, the room was filled with it. It spilled out of our souls, it ran down our arms, into the fingers holding the needles, into the needle points—

"Now!"

Allan Wando's needle flashed down.

There was a swish of air as twelve daggers sought twelve wax foreheads—pierced, slashed, tore.

Was it fancy, or did my very soul descend to tear the tiny features of the mannikin?

Was it fancy, or did the room throb with a single gigantic impulse that was our mass hate?

Was it fancy, or did I hear a gasp?

No—that wasn't fancy.

As the blades bit home, the gasp came from my side. Myra Weber's body pitched forward onto the table.

"Hold it!"

I rose to my feet, bent over her. Wando, seeing me, switched on extra lights.

The mood vanished in a babble of excitement. I lifted Myra's blonde head up. The eyes were staring, but—sightless.

"She's fainted," I said. "Too much excitement, weak heart."

Joe Adams was at my side. He reached for her wrist, held it. Then he turned. He didn't look at me, he didn't look at Wando. He talked to the wall.

"She's dead," he announced.

"Dead?"

"Cerebral hemmorhage." He indicated the bright red drop on the table, fallen like a bloody tear from her eye.

"But that wouldn't be from cerebral—" I began, and stopped. It had to be. Excitement, too much of it. Joe Adams was Myra Weber's doctor. He'd know. And it had to be that way.

"Get out of here, all of you," Adams said. "I'll certify it."

Of course he said a lot more, too, and so did everybody. There was enough silly gabbling and speculation and gaspings of horror to fill a small-sized book, but Joe Adams herded them all out as quickly as possible.

He and Wando and I were left alone. We looked at one another. It was better than looking at Myra.

Wando's face was white with fear.

"I knew what he was thinking. The black thought filled my own brain.

"Do you think we—what we were doing—had anything to do with it?" he managed, at last.

I answered for him. "Of course not. And, since it's all over and you won't try a silly sensational stunt like this again, I may as well tell you that you couldn't kill Hitler that way either."

"No?"

"No. Because you neglected the most important part of the sorcery. When you want to kill somebody with dolls, you must take care to have your church-wax candle moulded to include *part of the person it represents*. You must mix in a nail-clipping, or spittle, or perhaps a wisp of the victim's hair. That's essential. And you didn't have a hair of Hitler's mustache in the dolls, so it naturally didn't matter whether they represented Hitler or Charlie McCarthy. They wouldn't kill."

"But that hate—I felt it. And Myra died."

"Forget it," Adams echoed. "Cerebral hemmorhage, I'll swear to it. And you heard just now that the dolls won't kill unless they have something from a person's body in them."

"I want a drink." Wando wasn't kidding, either. He went for it.

"Go on home," Joe Adams advised me, when we were left alone. "Forget this whole affair. I'm sure none of the others will ever mention it—they all swore not to. It would start a scandal, and the whole thing is ridiculous, anyway. I'll make my report and smooth it over."

"All right," I said.

My hands strayed over the table, picked up one of the dolls. It was the one Wando had been working on, at Myra Weber's left side. I glanced blankly at the wax face. Didn't seem to be much of an artist, did Wando. Not even a mustache on his Hitler. And wait—there was something caught in the wax at the head!

I picked it out.

Stuck into the moulded wax was a long golden hair. A long golden hair, from the head of Myra Weber!

3

"WIN WITH WANDO!" screamed the billboards.

"VOTE FOR HONEST AL!" urged the window cards.

Why not? The "WANDO FOR SHERIFF" campaign was running full blast. I wouldn't stop it.

Weeks had passed since the unfortunate incident at Wando's party. Joe Adams had kept his word and hushed matters up. Certainly none of the others present would talk about it—it was much too unpleasant a subject.

As for myself, I kept silent. What good would it do to tell Wando? I didn't like the man, but even so it would not be fair to upset him. He couldn't help it. While he had been modelling, one of Myra Weber's hairs had fallen, brushed by her hands, and it became imbedded in the wax.

Myra Weber had died.

But of course, Wando didn't kill her. We were all hating equally.

More than that, the whole idea was silly. Hate and wax dolls don't kill a woman. Nervous excitement bringing on a cerebral hemmorhage—that can be understood. That's sane and simple. It can kill. But wild sorcery, never!

At least, I hoped not. And I vowed that I wouldn't put the question to any further tests.

So Mr. Wando began his campaign without my interference—but also without my help.

As a matter of fact, I was working on the opposite side of the fence. Believe it or not, Joe Adams had ambitions of his own.

The taciturn little medico confided in me after that strange evening. I'd never suspected he harbored a desire to run for public office, but he told me of his plans and they contained a great deal of common sense. It was my job to add dash and color to his ideas. Joe Adams had much the same thought as Wando — I must write speeches for the campaign. So, as fate would have it, I took the job and we automatically became opponents of our former host.

Adams was nobody's fool. Honest, capable, a shrewd observer, he relied upon me to dramatize his public platform appearances. I ferreted around in newspaper files to uncover facts on the present sheriff, and then played them up in speech form for campaign rallies and radio broadcasts.

Within three weeks Joe Adams had become the "Reform Candidate for Sheriff." His growing popularity was amazing.

Still more amazing, to me, was Wando's own campaign. I had automatically expected gladhander Wando to spend money like water, run around waving his membership cards and urge his fellow joiners to support him. I anticipated his free beer campaign, his lavish display of billboard and poster advertising.

Well, there were billboards and posters, but no Allan Wando. He held no public meetings. He distributed no campaign literature. He had no radio speeches. He didn't even bother to shake hands at church suppers. It was all strangely unlike the man—this reticence. I began to wonder whether or not the unfortunate episode at his party had shocked him out of his senses.

One rumor kept reaching me constantly —that Wando went everywhere with a group of unsavory strangers at his heels; foreigners or illiterate ward-heelers. That puzzled me more than all the rest.

Then I saw it with my own eyes.

On one morning the news broke that the present Sheriff had entered the race for re-election, opposing Wando and my candidate, Joe Adams. I dashed for the Election Commission offices for further details —and ran into Wando there.

He stood at the desk, surrounded by the

tall, dark strangers; three hawknosed men whose nasal voices twanged in a foreign tongue.

My entrance caused him to turn, and the men turned with him. Allan Wando gave me a single glance, and I knew that the rumors were correct, that my theory must be correct.

The man was mad.

The fat, triple-chinned face of a business man stared at me—but the eyes in that face fairly blazed. They burned with a life of their own, and they did not *belong* on that smug countenance. They were like the eyes of a serpent peering from the wooden sockets of a child's doll.

Wando stared, but gave no other sign of recognition save the deadly hate emanating from his unnatural eyes. Then one pudgy hand nudged the men at his side. His lips moved softly.

"That is one—remember him," he said. Or seemed to say.

And the dark men looked at me and grinned, and Wando grinned, and his grinning was worse than his hatred.

I'll admit I didn't hang around there. I left without accomplishing my mission, without taking a step further through the doorway. Of course I was foolish. Of course I was mawkishly melodramatic. Of course I was a coward.

But I'd rather be a live coward than a dead coward.

I can't explain it. Wando looked at me, and the dark men looked at me, and I *knew* I had to get out.

It's easy to explain it now. At the time, it didn't take five minutes before I was cursing myself for a fool.

"So he looks at you," I said. "So right away you think he's gone crazy. That gleam in his eye might be indigestion."

I kicked myself mentally—but hard.

"So he's got three mulattoes with him for bodyguards. What does that mean? Let him walk down the street with Cab Calloway's orchestra and it still shouldn't upset you so."

Oh, it was a great job of reassuring myself I did when I got out on the street again.

But I didn't go back.

I WENT for a shave.

As I settled back in the chair at Tony's Barber Shop, I remembered that I ought to combine business with pleasure. After all, the sheriff himself had entered the race today, and I ought to feel out the public pulse on the matter—see how it would affect the election.

So after a few remarks on the weather and Europe and the current baseball standings, I steered Tony the barber around to politics.

"What do you think about the elections?" I began.

"Pretty hot, eh?" Tony ventured.

"Right. Particularly the sheriff's race. How do the boys feel about the sheriff coming out today and saying he's going to run again?"

"In the bag for sure," said Tony. "Sheriff, he'sa gonna make it easy. He'sa good man, sheriff."

"Really think so?" I wanted to ask about Joe Adams' chances, but Tony's eyes began to sparkle.

"You know, she's a funny thing. Every day, I shave-a sheriff right here in this chair."

"That so?"

"You betcha. Today I shave two sheriffs."

"Two?"

"Sure. First a real sheriff, he's come-a in, get shave. Then, right away after, I shave this fella Wando who'sa run against him."

"Wando?" I played dumb. "Do you think he's got any chance in the race, Tony?"

Tony laughed. "No—he's what you

call one crazy fella. You betcha," he chuckled. "One crazy fella. You know whatta he do?"

"What?"

"He ask me—he ask me right here, cross over my heart, was a sheriff in here today? I tell him sure. Then he say he want to buy the sheriff's shaving mug."

"Go on." I said, through the lather.

"I tell him it'sa all dirty yet — not cleaned out. But he say, swell, that's just-a what he's wants. So he gives me fifty cents for sheriff's mug and walks out. One crazy fella!"

"Dirty shaving mug—hair in it and all?" I said.

"You betcha! Crazy fella, Wando, he'sa no good."

"You're telling me?"

"What he want with sheriff's old hair? What he—*hey, come back!*"

But I didn't come back. I went out of there, cut face and all, raced across the street, and dived into a drug-store phone booth.

I called Joe Adams.

"Joe," I panted. "Maybe I'm crazy, but I just stumbled across something big. Our friend Wando is out to—"

I should have seen the three of them following me, ever since I went into the barber shop. I should have seen them closing in on the phone booth now as I talked. But I didn't.

Consequently, as I uttered the opening words of my sentence to Joe Adams, my connection went dead.

Nobody cut the wires.

But somebody—*cut my throat!*

4

THAT'S what it felt like. My last impression was of those arms tightening around my neck in the phone booth, of the cold steel that swept up across my face.

When I woke up at Emergency Hospital with Joe Adams at my side, I found my head wrapped in bandages.

"Just missed the jugular," Adams assured me. "Somebody spotted them, and I guess they got frightened. Cut your face open in a few places, but nothing serious. You'll be all right in a few weeks."

"Who were they?" I whispered. Maybe it was because I didn't *want* to hear the answer.

"Three dark strangers. Fellow behind the counter didn't notice them when they came in.

Clustered around your phone booth, and when he looked up and started to say something, they ran. He found you, called the cops. They got away."

"Of course," I whispered. You don't talk loud through bandages.

Joe Adams bent over me. "What was it?" he asked. "What were you trying to tell me? Who were they, do you know?"

"They weren't supporters of Adams for Sheriff," I told him. "I'll explain later. Now we've got to get going."

"Get up? You'll have to stay in bed, take it easy a few days."

"Can't do it." I sat erect, fighting off pinwheels that rose in my brain. "That's why I called you. We must go to a political rally tonight. The sheriff is holding his opening meeting."

"But—"

"You can't see the look of grim determination on my face under these bandages, Joe," I said. "But it's there, and we're going. We must, I tell you."

We went.

THE hall, on the west side of the city, was crowded. The sheriff was a popular man with the voters.

Joe and I arrived late. He was still trying to make me talk, and I wouldn't. He argued with me even as we took our places at the rear of the hall—and others turned around and grumbled.

"Shhh! Shuddup, willya? We wanta hear!"

We quieted down and stared at the lighted stage. The sheriff was already speaking.

His tall, commanding figure, topped by a mane of silvery hair, bent in animation as he delivered his address. Leaning on the table and bringing down his fist for emphasis, he launched into a flood of oratory calculated to drown his listeners in political platitudes,

I made no pretense of listening, at first. Then my ears caught a mumbling from the crowd ahead. Yes, right there.

Craning my head, I saw what I feared.

Seated down front, facing the stage, was Allan Wando. And next to him, three dark figures, heads together. The mumbling was coming from their throats.

Spectators tapped Wando on the shoulder as I watched. He shrugged, turned away, and continued to drone unintelligible sounds. It was as though he and his companions were in a church and—chanting.

Chanting! That was it. They *were* chanting!

The sheriff thundered on. He must have heard it, for his voice rose to drown out these "hecklers" in the crowd. He leaned toward the audience.

The chanting rose.

And I felt *it*. Amidst five hundred grimy citizens, packed like squirming sardines into the smoky, sweaty atmosphere of a political meeting, I felt the breath of ancient evil blow.

My bandaged face was bathed in perspiration. I half-rose. I had to stop it, crazy or not. I started down the aisle, as the chanting and the sheriff's voice rose to a crescendo.

I stared at his distorted, purpling face. He was screaming in unconscious apoplexy, hands upraised.

And then—voice and chanting vanished beneath a gasp from five hundred throats.

In mid-sentence, in mid-flourish, the sheriff halted. The tall body swayed, bent forward, and suddenly crumpled to the floor in a writhing heap.

A scream from the audience. Everybody rose at once. The campaign managers raced onto the platform, gathered around the contorted body of the sheriff.

I fought my way down that aisle, Joe Adams behind me. The crowd peered back toward the exits. It was almost panic. A man on stage was trying to placate the mob, bawling about "sudden heart attack" through the microphone system. It didn't mean a thing. They fled from the place in droves.

It didn't mean a thing when the police arrived, or the ambulance.

What really mattered was that Wando and his three chanting companions were gone with the crowd, lost in the swirl fighting for an exit.

What did mean a thing was that the sheriff, before they carried him from the stage, was dead.

Apoplexy.

I didn't hear the news.

I was bending over the seats Wando and his henchmen had occupied. Bending over and searching the floor with my fingers.

Something pierced my thumb. I picked it up. It was a long needle, the kind Wando had passed out at his fateful party.

Then I stooped again and got the other object. Joe Adams was at my side when I raised it to the light.

The tiny black frock coat, the striped trousers, and the little necktie were covered with dust from the floor. But the devil's doll leered in the light, and its face was the face of the dead sheriff.

Buried in the heart was a long silver needle.

Buried in the wax beneath was a cluster of grizzled hair—grizzled hair from a human beard. The kind of hair one finds

in a barber's mug, after a man has been shaved.

Joe gasped.

I didn't. I grabbed his arm.

"Come on," I snapped.

"Where?"

"To see a barber, first. And then—we're going to pay a visit to Mr. Allan Wando."

5

THE squad car picked up the three dark foreigners in, of all places, the YMCA. Joe and I didn't offer many details; just hinted around that these men should be held on suspicion, because of their presence at the meeting.

Then we left the cops, and hurried along to Wando's apartment.

"Why don't we take them with us?" Joe asked. "Better still, why not send them to lock him up?"

I shrugged my bandaged head. "He'd be out tomorrow," I told him. "You can't convict a man on a charge of witchcraft."

"Witchcraft?" Joe's voice was tense. "It's all so strange—what you've told me, and what the barber said, and what he intends to do."

"He'll do it, if we don't hurry. Step on it."

Joe stepped on it.

I pushed the buzzer.

Wando opened the door.

Joe crowded in.

Wando's jaw dropped.

I got a look at the table and saw the two figures.

Wando stepped behind me.

Joe let out an oath.

Wando pulled the gun.

And there we were. Oh it was simple. Just like the movies. But not quite as pleasant. I remembered my thought about going into Wando's office—that spider and fly simile. Well, it was true now. We were two flies, caught properly in Wando's web.

A web of wax, and an insane spider to spin. To spin—and break the thread of life.

Joe Adams and I stood there in his apartment. His gun rested upon our breasts, and his burning eyes smoldered up.

"I might have expected this visit," he half-chuckled. "You have a very clever campaign manager, Mr. Adams. Unfortunately, your campaign is now ended.

Joe and I both stared behind him at the table—the table I had just bent over, staring down at the two wax dolls that stood upon it.

Joe and I both stared at our miniature selves—the tiny little fat figure of Joe Adams, with the incongruous wire spectacles, and the tall figure with the bandaged face that represented me.

Wando caught our gaze and smiled. The gun never wavered.

"I suppose you know what I am going to do," he said. "You must have, or you'd never have come."

"That's right," I answered, keeping my voice firm—just as firm as the muzzle of the gun trained on my chest. "I figured it all out. You *did* kill Myra Weber intentionally, didn't you?"

"Right," acknowledged Allan Wando. "It was an experiment. And it worked."

"Then you went a little mad, I suppose."

"Mad? Who is mad? Witchcraft is a science, not the product of a diseased imagination. Witchcraft can kill, and by killing one attains power."

Wando's voice rose shrilly.

"Yes, but only a madman would have the supreme audacity of your enterprise," I said. "You got hold of those foreigners somewhere to aid you in the work. They helped you in chanting, in focussing your hate. Tonight, after making a doll of

the sheriff and mixing in part of his beard, you went to the hall and killed him."

"Who would believe that?" Wando laughed. "If you told that story to the police *you'd* be the madman, not I! Of course, you will never tell that story, because your turn is next." He came nearer.

"Your image is finished," he told me. "It was so obliging of you to do what the sheriff did—go to the barber shop and get shaved. After my men failed to finish you off today, I went back for some of *your* hair."

"The barber told me tonight."

Wando smiled in acknowledgment. "Very clever. *Very* clever! But it will not do you much good, I fear. I must also thank you for bringing Mr. Adams to me. I have not finished his doll yet. I need a lock of his hair."

Wando's hand went to the table, and clutched a scissors. Approaching Adams, he snipped at his forehead, holding the gun ready with his other hand.

Clutching a wisp of hair, he turned to the table. The free hand kneaded the wax figure of Adams. Wando sat there and moulded, kept the gun on me. We stood waiting.

It was *all wrong*.

As a writer, I felt it. Even in the face of death, I felt it. A sorcerer doesn't mould *poppets* with one hand and hold a gun in the other. A sorcerer doesn't get hair from shaving mugs in modern barber shops.

A sorcerer doesn't work under the fluorescent lights of a modern apartment and above all, a sorcerer doesn't run for sheriff.

THEN Wando turned his face to me and I forgot it all. Evil is evil, through all the ages, whatever its outward guise may be. The fat face of the business man, the politician, the gladhander, was no more. The eyes of a necromancer lanced upwards, and the pale hand shaping its doll of death now groped for a needle.

The eyes, the doll, and the needle—these were all that mattered. Twentieth century, business, politics; what were such concepts but empty words masking an ancient horror? The dolls of death had killed in ages past, and they could kill again. The hair or skin or nail parings of a human, mixed with the wax of a church candle shaped in his image. The knife to the heart of the wax, and the death of the human—if the sorcerer hated, and believed in his hate.

That was reality, black reality, rising in waves that beat at my brain.

Those eyes, and the hand with the needle, and the little doll with the bandaged head which was myself.

Wando stared at me.

"Now you know," he whispered. "Call it madness or Black Magic if you like. Names don't matter. Deeds do. And I shall do deeds. Myra Weber, and the sheriff, then you and Adams. I shall be the new sheriff."

Again he laughed, self-consciously.

"Silly notion, isn't it? This power for such a goal? But a man must crawl before he walks, and I'm merely experimenting as yet."

"You knew that, didn't you?" The stare was dreadful in its intensity.

"You knew that I'm not stopping here. Ways and means, my friend. I'll be sheriff, but not for long. Business rivals will be going next. I can become governor, president, yes more than that! You think I'm mad, but I'm using sound sense. I'll rise; slowly but surely, and by proper means in the public eye. I'll move from office to office as men die accidental deaths—but it will all be politics, just politics. The good old American way."

"The good old American way," said this man, his fat hands clutching the little wax figure of doom.

"I shall have power, great power. And

no one will know, no one will suspect. For you won't be here to tell them—will you?"

"You'll never get away with it," I said. "They'll find us here, and then—"

"You'll be found at home, in your beds," Wando corrected me. "I'm going to take you there, in just a few moments. A *very* few moments. First you, then Adams. No, stand still—I'll shoot if I must. But I prefer the dolls, my little dolls, and the needles that—"

"It won't work," I sparred. "Nobody to chant, and I—I don't believe it!"

Wando rose, holding the doll in one hand, the gun and needle in the other.

"You believe it," he said, slowly. "For it is true. In a moment I shall plunge the needle into the waxen heart, and you shall die. And Adams shall die next. And others will die, many others. And so it ends."

I didn't hear. I stared at the hand holding the doll with the bandaged head, stared at the needle coming down toward the tiny body, stared at the waxen breast, stared at Wando's hate-filled eyes.

"Wando!" screamed Joe.

But it was too late.

The needle plunged home into the wax image.

For a long moment nothing happened. The three of us stood there. Wando's hand held the tiny figure, the long silver needle knifing its breast.

AND then, slowly, a *look* came over his face. A look of horror, of fear, of burning agony. The hand dropped the doll. The other hand dropped the gun. Allan Wando clutched at his heart, eyes gazing at me in dreadful anguish. Then, like a scarecrow lifted from its pole, Wando sagged to the floor.

Joe stepped over to the body.

"Phone the cops," I said. "He's dead. Shock."

Joe phoned.

I made a fire in the fireplace and as the flames rose I threw in the extra wax candles and needles I found, and the tiny doll that was Joe Adams. I took the hair out of it first, very carefully. Then I got ready to throw in the doll with the needle in it—the doll with the bandaged face that Wando stabbed when he died.

Joe Adams watched me.

"Too bad Wando was mad," I commented. "He believed so much that he was going to kill me by sticking pins in a wax figure that the excitement got him. What nonsense!"

Suddenly Joe Adams reached out. "Let's see the doll," he said.

I tossed it quickly into the fire.

"Damn you!" said Joe Adams. "You—"

The flames crackled up. We turned. The fire was closing over the wax, eating away the cloth bandages on the head. We saw the flames flicker over the revealed face.

It wasn't my face on the doll. It was Allan Wando's.

"So that's what you did," Adams whispered. "Went to the barber's again tonight, got some of his hair, made a doll, and switched dolls with his when we came in here at first. So that when he thought he was stabbing an image of you he was really stabbing himself."

I took the other doll out of my pocket and dug out hair, then threw it into the fire when Adams wasn't looking. Then I laughed.

"You can't believe such stuff," I chuckled. "Wando killed himself. Just remember that. Wando killed himself."

We both turned by common impulse and stared at the wax figure of the doll. The face was melting, coagulating into slime, oozing away. The features of Allan Wando had disappeared, and the body followed. There was only a shapeless blob.

"Trick of light," I assured Joe, confidently. "You thought you saw his face. But it wasn't any doll of him I made, and

there wasn't any part of Allan Wando's body in it. Besides, what happens to a wax image doesn't affect a real person."

"All right if you say so," Joe Adams shrugged. "Maybe it's better that way."

And we turned away from the melted wax figure in the fire.

I'm sorry we did. I know it would have been better that way—if Joe Adams had believed me.

But he couldn't.

When we turned away from the fire we saw Allan Wando's body lying on the floor.

Something had happened to it, was happening.

Slowly the face disappeared. Melted away. And the body oozed into a shapeless blob.

By the time we had clawed open the door, there was nothing left of Allan Wando but a melted heap shining in the firelight.

He looked like the liquid, sticky remnants of a gigantic wax doll. And the fire burned on. . . .

Reincarnation

By GERALD CHAN SIEG

THROUGHOUT the ages I have known
Your lovely laughter and your tears,
Your fingers locking with my own.
I saved you from a dinosaur,
Then lost you till the spinning years
Returned you in the Trojan War.

Together we endured the whips
Of pagan Rome and, singing, died;
Together watched the Tartar ships
Unloading silk from dim Cathay
Which softly robed you as my bride.
(*A thousand years are but a day.*)

I found you next in Aragon,
A maiden hid in costly lace;
And later—ah, sweet Puritan
In your prim bonnet, sober dress,
Who went with courage in your face
To dare with me a wilderness!

Your mind cannot recall the past.
You would be frightened if you knew
What powers, dark, eternal, vast,
I have controlled throughout the years
To keep the essence that is you:
Your lovely laughter and your tears!

"In the darkness two semi-shapes glided swiftly by, like puffs of smoke from the house."

The Half-Haunted

By GANS T. FIELD

Would YOU laugh if something followed you all around your home—something cold and sneaky, that wasn't even there when you turned your head?

I went into a house, and it wasn't a house. —A. A. MILNE.

FOR six months Judge Pursuivant had intended to visit that old dwelling with the strange history, but Judge Pursuivant often has trouble finding time to do what he most wants. The fall passed, the winter came. He spent Christmas, not very joyfully, helping the widow of a friend repossess some property at Salem. New Year's Eve found him at Harrison-

ville, where de Grandin and Towbridge wanted his word on translating certain old Dutch documents better left untranslated. Heading west and south toward his home, he passed Scott's Meadows. And, though it was nearly dark and snowy, he could not resist the opportunity to visit Criley's Mill then and there.

A druggist on the little main street gave him directions. The judge drove up a steep ill-paved road, then between hills crowned with naked trees. Eventually he came to an old quarry road and followed it to here, across a rapid brown brook, a creaky bridge led to the place.

By the last rays of the sun, he decided he had either come the wrong way or come too late.

He had heard of a tall, gaunt building, the ruins of a mill house—a place two hundred years old, that looked two thousand. This was almost the opposite—quite new, of brown shingles, low and rambling, with a screened porch and wide windows. The place should have been cheerful, but it was not.

Pursuivant drove across, got out and knocked at the door. Snow began to shimmer down. Lights went on in the front room, and a man opened the door. He was small and slim, with a gray forelock and a lined, shrewd face, reminiscent of the late Will Rogers. He wore a smoking jacket and slippers.

"Yes?" he half challenged.

"Excuse me," replied Pursuivant, hunching his massive shoulders, "but is this Criley's Mill? The haunted house?"

"Haunted?" echoed the man on the threshold. "Why, I—I don't know."

There seemed to be only one thing to say. Pursuivant shook snowflakes from his tawny mustache and said it: "I'm sorry to have troubled you. I seem to have made a mistake."

At once the other changed his manner. "Oh, no, sir. No mistake. This *was* the place. You see, I built where Criley's Mill was—just finished and moved in on Thanksgiving—look here, won't you come in? I'm sorry if I was abrupt. Just nerves. I didn't know who might be coming to my door—so far away from everything—"

His gaunt little hand caught at Pursuivant's big one. "Come in, sir. Or—wait. It's putting on to snow. I've got a double garage around back. Want to slide your car in with mine? Then we'll have a drink. Maybe a bite to eat."

He wanted Pursuivant to stay. The judge gazed at him with big blue eyes, deceptively innocent. Then he nodded and said, "Thanks. I'll be very glad to stay."

AFTER stowing the car, he returned through the snow. The little man still waited at the door to usher him in. "What did you say your name was?"

The judge had not said, but he replied, "Pursuivant. Judge Keith Pursuivant. I'm interested in haunted houses."

"And I'm Alvin Scrope—country editor, retired, bachelor." They were in the front room now, a room designed to answer a man's prayer for comfort. It had cushioned furniture, thick rugs, bright pictures, plenty of light, a shelf of books. But, as outside, the cheer was somehow lacking. "You'll have to pardon me," said Alvin Scrope. "My house boy left here New Year's eve, and I'm running the place alone for a day or so."

From a side table he lifted a bottle of scotch and a syphon. Mixing two highballs, he gave one to Pursuivant. "Snow's coming down harder. You'd better plan to stay the night."

Pursuivant laid aside overcoat and black hat. "You are very kind," he said, wondering why he had been half-rebuffed at first, then almost wheedled into entering. Alvin Scrope dabbed at his forelock.

"Yes, sir," he said, trying to sound

hearty, "I built this right where the old mill stood. How d'you like it?"

The judge fitted his big body into an armchair, and sipped. "I don't quite know yet. I've only come. How do you like it yourself, Mr. Scrope?"

Another dab at the forelock. "To tell the truth, I don't know either." He, too, drank before continuing. "Maybe because I've never had a place of my own before. And I've been used to working, always on the go with my paper—now I'm a little lost with all the slack time on my hands. You know how that is. But when I first saw the spot, with the ruined mill and all, stuck away here, I thought it was as nice a building site as I'd ever heard of."

"I've been told a little about the mill and its legend," ventured Pursuivant, rummaging a pocket for his pipe. At once his host began the tale, as Pursuivant had hoped:

"The place, I understand, was built before the War of Independence. It was owned and run by a man named Criley. He had a wife, a son and a daughter."

"Mind if I take notes?" asked Pursuivant, producing notebook and pen. "Go on, Mr. Scrope."

"Well, the war came. The miller and his son joined Washington's army. The British took New York, and there was a long, hard scrap to see whether they'd stop there or take the rest of the country, too."

PURSUIVANT nodded. He knew that dark, desperate phase of his nation's history. After the first disaster to American arms, the fighting had taken on the somber complexion of raids, ambuscades, betrayals. Considerable savagery on both sides. Nathan Hale and John Andre—two fine gentlemen—hanged like felons. Thousands of other tragedies. All the New York area—including this part of New Jersey—stuck full of grim deeds, giving rise to creepy tales.

Scrope went on:

"New York had quite a few Hessian soldiers stationed around—hired to fight the Americans, you know."

Again Pursuivant nodded. His Virginia ancestor had followed Washington in the battle of Trenton. "The Hessians weren't very fierce fighters," he commented.

"There was an exception to that rule," Scrope declared pithily. "Still taking notes, Judge?—I can't tell you this particular Hessian's name, but it comes down in the story how he looked. Big as you, I figure. Burly. He was a famous hunter back home in Germany. Maybe a criminal, joining the army to escape— Anyway, he could beat the Americans at their own game of hunt and shoot."

"That's hard to believe," rejoined Pursuivant. "Some of Washington's men were hard-set old Indian fighters."

"This Hessian outdid the Indians. He'd strip naked—even in winter—and paint himself like a Mohawk and sally out to kill. He was a dead shot, and a devil with sword or hatchet or knife." Scrope paused to bite the end off a cigar. "He could track or stalk anything, and he'd fight two soldiers at a time. Sometimes more. He raided farms and murdered civilians, even women and children. Quite a score he ran up."

Scribbling in his book, the judge could see in his mind one of those fancy-portraits so often vivid—a naked colossus, streaked with red and black, a heavy-boned face, thick, pale brows over slitted eyes. A belt stuck full of weapons. Had the Hessian looked like that? Pursuivant filled his pipe and thrust it under his mustache. "Go on," he prompted.

"The two women left here at the mill hated and feared that Hessian. They plotted against him. Pretended to be British sympathizers, and scraped an acquaintance."

"That was nervy of them," commented the judge. His mind's eye showed him new

pictures. Probably the daughter made the overture—buxom, rosy-cheeked on a chill afternoon, she managed to encounter the man of blood on a country lane. The Hessian would be a heavy-handed gallant. His broad, tough face grinned admiringly. The rural beauty, trying not to tremble, would venture a return smile, a curtsey.

"They invited him to dinner," Scrope continued. "He put on his best uniform—"

Strange that Hessian butcher would look in full dress—white small-clothes and gaiters modelling his brawny legs, the red coat with white facings and shiny buttons cramping his barrel torso. How out of place the powdered hair, the tall grenadier cap! But Scrope was getting on to the climax:

"When he sat down at the table, one of the women—mother or daughter, the stories disagree—stuck a serving knife into his back. They got rid of the body somehow—walled it up or buried it in the cellar. But the spirit returned."

"How many saw it?" demanded Pursuivant.

"Many. The mother died of fright, and the daughter of jumping from an attic window, before the year was out. The son committed suicide before he'd been long back from the war—nobody says anything about the father, I guess he was killed in some battle. Well, that disposed of the family. The mill went out of use. There's lots of newer yarns. A girl from Scott's Meadows yonder stayed one night ten years ago, on a dare. Next morning she was roaming around, too crazy to talk."

"And you bought the place?"

"Yes. Tore down the old mill house, and rebuilt on its foundations. Shouldn't that lay any ghosts, Judge Pursuivant?"

"Most rebuilders prefer to burn the haunted place entirely," said the judge. "However, that depends on how much they believe in ghosts. I take it that you don't laugh at these stories."

Scrope almost bit his cigar in two. "Would you laugh," he asked, "if two houseboys quit on you inside of six weeks? If something followed you all around your cellar, something cold and sneaky, that wasn't ever there when you turned around? If you fidgeted all the time, like at a play by Ibsen or a story by Poe? It's no laughing matter, Judge."

Pursuivant leaned forward. "You imagine disturbing sights and sounds?"

"Right. Never quite see or hear them—just a whisper, a shadow in dim places, when I'm all alone here. I wish," and Scrope grew somber, "that I belonged to some classical old church. A priest, with bell, book and candle, would be mighty comforting."

"Just so," agreed Pursuivant. "It so happens that I know an old formula of exorcism. I'm not a clergyman, but I offer it for what it's worth, as charm or psychological clearance."

Scrope frowned, then smiled. The subject was new to him. Pursuivant made haste to be logical: "I'm not trying to make an occult convert out of you, Mr. Scrope. But it seems that a symbol or ceremony might serve as rationalization—a psychological peg to hang your worries on and forget them entirely—"

"Right as a rabbit!" cried Scrope, almost explosively. "Go ahead, Judge. Do it."

Pursuivant set down glass and pipe, and stood up. Scrope also rose from his chair. In so doing he moved backward and stood almost by the darkened door that led to the rear of the house. Pursuivant began solemnly:

"All ye evil spirits, I forbid you this man's bed, his couch; I forbid you, in heaven's name, his house and home; I forbid you, in the name of God, his blood and flesh, his body and soul. Let all evil return from him and his, unto you and yours, in the name of the Trinity."

He finished, and Scrope's face showed a sudden thankful relief—which went out like a light. Scrope's thin body suddenly gyrated, reeled. His mouth opened, shouting:

"Let go! Let go!"

HE staggered backward to the door, turned halfway and braced himself against the jamb. He seemed to struggle with something beyond. Pursuivant sprang toward him, and at that instant Scrope was walking shakily back toward the center of the room. His eyes were glassy, his lips slack, his face pale.

"Thought it had me," he panted.

"What?" demanded Pursuivant, quickly pouring whiskey.

"Didn't you see? That big thing with a naked arm—and no eyes—"

"Drink this. I saw nothing."

Scrope drank obediently. Color returned a little. He spoke rapidly, as one who convinces himself of a hopeful fact: "My imagination ran away with me, didn't it?"

"Did it?"

Pursuivant filled Scrope's glass again. Plainly Scrope was trying to save his nerves by chatter. "Oh, it's quite clear, Judge. I've keyed up my imagination to what seems like reality. I was sure some sort of boogey—but if you didn't see it—"

"If I didn't see it," Pursuivant took up Scrope's words, "there is still no proof that it doesn't exist."

Scrope looked blank, and Pursuivant continued, "I take nothing for granted. This looks like the beginning of one of my adventures."

"But look here!" Scrope suddenly went a little wild in his speech. "You were reciting a spell against just that sort of thing. Why should—it—dare to tackle—"

"Desperation. To stave off defeat. Wait here."

He went to the inner door and peered. There was a dim hallway to a kitchen, an open doorway for a bathroom at the left, and two closed doors to the right. He asked about them.

"Bedrooms," replied Scrope, steadying his voice. "Want a light?"

"No, thanks." Pursuivant entered the hall.

IT WAS like stepping into a fog—into the vapor, for instance, of many damp, filthy coats in a sealed closet. Pursuivant snorted, and walked quickly through to the kitchen, turning on a light. Breathing was comfortable there. The sweat dried on his brow and his tawny mustache.

"All clear?" Scrope was asking.

"So far." The judge gazed around the clean white kitchen, with automatic refrigerator and electric range. It was the most reassuring room so far. He walked back into the hall, then into the rear bedroom.

"That's my room," Scrope informed him, from the parlor door.

Pursuivant waited only a moment in the chamber, which filled the rear quarter opposite the kitchen. Then into the hall yet again, to glance into the bathroom. It was a fight to throw off the smothering spiritual weight hanging in the dim atmosphere. Finally to the closed door of the front bedroom. "Who sleeps here?" he asked, hand on knob.

"You will, if you stay tonight," Scrope replied, and the judge entered.

In the first instant he thought he had been struck—his knees wavered, his brain swam and darkened. The walls—weren't they ruinous, flaking away?—whirled around him in the gloom. But he kept his feet and his head, groped for the light switch, turned it.

He had been wrong. The room was quite modern, cream-papered, and should be bright; but the light was as murky as though it shone through smoke. A neat single bed, a bureau, an armchair—how

could that arrangement cause such a deep shadow in the far corner? Or was it a shadow?

The weight he had felt in the hall was doubled here, crushing him as a diver is crushed by sea-bottom pressures. The switch clicked, though Pursuivant had not touched it. The light went out abruptly.

Something pawed at him through the darkness. A hand—he saw it dimly, but not its arm. Was there an arm? Pursuivant jerked away, but refused to retreat. Now a face hung in the thick dusk—a head, anyway, for he made out the contour only, not the features. But it must have a mouth. For he felt a fanning of tepid breath, heard a mumble that became a word of sorts:

"Raus. . . ."

German. *Get out!*

Pursuivant stared at the hanging oval, trying to find eyes to fix with his own. Now another touch, at his shoulder. Light this time. Fluffy. Another voice, so soft as to be felt rather than heard:

"No . . . stay . . . you came to save. . . ."

The featureless head became more solid, and a suggestion of body was visible beneath—thick, as big as Pursuivant's own body. Wide-planted columns that might be mist-moulded legs. Again: *"Raus!"*

Pursuivant backed from the room, leaving the door open. He was in the parlor again, wiping his face. He felt better.

Scrope, mixing more drinks, looked at him questioningly. "You felt it too, huh?"

"I felt something. For a moment I saw." The judge paused to marshal his findings. "Who has ever slept in that front bedroom?"

"Nobody. The house-boy—before he left—had a lean-to off the kitchen. You're inaugurating my guest room tonight, judge. Here, have a drink."

They touched glasses and drank. Then they crossed the heavy-aired hall to the kitchen. Scrope quickly cooked a meal, simple but hearty—ham, eggs, home-fried potatoes, strong coffee. They ate at a white-topped table. Pursuivant acted as though fear had not come to him that night.

"I suggested that the Hessians weren't good fighters," he observed, holding out his cup, "but they were Germanic—and Germany has been the home of witches and devils. Read *Faust,* read *Phantasmagoria,* read the Brothers Grimm. And in a file of *Old New York*—out of print now—I found a story of how two Hessian soldiers bewitched a Manhattan farmer."

"True story?"

"It's in the reminiscences of George Rapaelje. That's a respected name in old New York history. Rapaelje claims to have seen it happen. Yes, and other Hessians—settling in Pennsylvania and New Jersey—worked magic."

"Of course. Look at that Headless Horseman yarn of Irving's," contributed Scrope. "Judge, you've got something. If that spell you recited—I wish you hadn't, for it didn't work."

Pursuivant looked earnestly at Scrope. "I didn't finish. It must be said three times, an hour apart." He drew out a thick gold watch. "And an hour has passed, or nearly."

Quite steadily, if not casually, he walked into the hall. Scrope came just behind. Again Pursuivant felt the baleful weight and closeness. Undaunted, he began to recite for the second time:

"All ye evil spirits, I forbid you this man's bed, his couch; I forbid you, in heaven's name, his house and home; I forbid—"

It had come heavily, noiselessly, out of the front bedroom. A hunchbacked hulk of it, that straightened and showed itself as tall and powerful as Pursuivant.

The judge knew amazement, complete but rational. Even in the half-light, he made out only a silhouette, roughly human,

vague at the edges—clothed or naked, he could not say. As before, a faceless head lifted itself on broad shoulders. Only the fingers of the hand were distinct. They spread, advanced. Thus his eyes summed up, while he kept reciting the exorcism, down to its end:

"—all evil return from him and his unto you and yours, in the name of the Trinity."

It blundered forward, clutching.

The doorway was no place to fight in, not even if the foe were normal. Pursuivant retreated, quickly and lightly for all his bearlike weight. Behind him, Scrope had run whimpering to the back door, tried to tear it open without unlocking.

"Come on!" Scrope was crying. "We'll get out of here!"

"Wait!" called Pursuivant in reply. "Look!" And Scrope paused and turned back.

"The thing's gone," said Pursuivant. "It vanished before my eyes as I retreated."

He clasped his big hands behind his back, scowling. Something was wrong here; absolutely unconventional—for there is a certain unconventionality about demons and their ways.

How often did the old books say that the best way to quell a specter is to face it dauntlessly? Yet here was the exact reverse. The foe had faded only when he and Scrope fled. He glared at the empty hall, as though to read there an answer to the enigma.

But the hall was not empty. In it was another pale suggestion of shape, slender this time. And the softer voice he had sensed in the bedroom:

"Again—again—"

It, too, vanished.

Scrope drew alongside of Pursuivant, peering. "Judge, were you and I seeing things? Both of us?"

Pursuivant actually grinned, and shook his tawny head. "No chance of that, Scrope. People who see things don't see the same things at the same time."

"Group-hypnotism," began Scrope, as though the word might be a comfort, but again Pursuivant gestured a demur.

"I believe in many strange things, Scrope, but not in that. Don't go back into the hall. Sit here, in the kitchen. I begin to understand—to guess, at least."

They sought their chairs. Pursuivant faced the door.

"The old familiar situation, worn threadbare by writers of fantasy," he pronounced. "The murdered one haunts the place of his destruction." He stared hard into the hallway, wondering if he had really seen a stir of movement there. "Anyway, it's here—spiteful and harmful, able to attack—"

"That's right," nodded Scrope, sighing. "He appeared to me, then you, then to both of us."

"Which brings us to point number two. The spell is going to work."

Scrope glanced up in almost prayerful eagerness. "You're sure?"

"Not quite sure of anything in life or death, but this thing's desperate. It's trying to fight us. I gather, from what you tell me, that it never manifested itself so strongly before—"

Scrope was nodding eagerly. "Sure. It's been around here, a sort of edgy atmosphere that drove my house-boys away—but nothing like this. As you say, it's playing the game for keeps now."

"It's in danger," replied Pursuivant, his blue eyes remaining fixed on the hallway. "So are we. But it's alone in its fight, and we have friends."

"Friends?" echoed Scrope.

"I saw another shape, or near-shape. Twice. It doesn't threaten. It pleads. It wants us to go ahead and win."

Scrope gazed at Pursuivant. "I think I saw it, too. But if it's a ghost—"

"Don't you realize that a ghost might want release? And others beside the Hessians found a tragic death here. Two women, didn't you say—I heard a voice ask for the final repetition of my spell. *Again,* it said."

"We-ell—" began Scrope uncertainly.

"The spirits of those two women are here, too," said Pursuivant confidently. "The evil of the place is too strong to let them escape, even though they're dead."

"Judge!" gasped Scrope, very pale. He swallowed twice, and continued:

"You realize something? If something happens to us—"

"Exactly," agreed Pursuivant, very steadily. "We'd be caught, too. For all eternity. I realize it perfectly. That is why we must push this thing through to the end—and win."

He rose once again and went to the door. Foot on the sill, he leaned ever so narrowly in. Then he drew quickly back, like a spectator from the cage of an angry beast.

"Still here," he reported. "Ready for us. It, too, knows that the showdown's at hand."

Scrope studied the doorway, eyes and lips hard. "I've got a theory. It stays in that part of the house, the middle part. Might it live in the cellar?"

"Why?" asked Judge Pursuivant.

"Because the cellar—the old basement—lies only under the bathroom and the hall and that guestroom, with only a bit lapping under parts of the kitchen and—"

"By thunder, you have it!" interrupted Pursuivant excitedly.

While Scrope stared, the judge fished his pen from his vest pocket. He began to sketch, on the table-top.

"See here," he lectured as he drew. "Your house is sprawling—great big rooms, making a wide base, like this." He outlined a square. "And the cellar is rather centrally located, so." He marked in a smaller rectangle, which took a middle slice of the square.

"Yes. That's about like it," nodded Scrope. "What are you getting at?"

"Don't you see, man?" cried Pursuivant, almost roughly. "That basement shows the limits of the old house—narrow and high, just as this new one is broad and low. The spirit haunted the old place. Your house takes in that original territory, and some new ground as well."

He threw down the pen.

"You're only half haunted, Scrope."

Understanding dawned into the little man's face. He sprang to his feet. He began a glad jabber:

"That changes everything. We're safe. If we don't go in there—"

"Oh, but we're going in there."

Scrope looked wide-eyed, scared. Pursuivant elaborated:

"The last recital of the spell will take place right in that thing's den—right on his own dunghill, so to speak. We'll destroy him forever, where he can't seek refuge from us."

AGAIN an hour was passed. The two rose from their chairs in the kitchen.

"It's time," said Scrope, looking at his wrist watch. "Judge, must I come in there with you?"

"You must," Pursuivant assured him. "Into that front bedroom. The creature must face his final exorcism."

He walked to the hall, and in. Scrope kept close behind, on feet that sounded amazingly heavy for so small a body. They stood together in the hall's dimness.

It was no longer the hall, new and narrow and fresh-painted in light color. It was a corner of something else.

Despite the gloom, Pursuivant could see plainly that the walls had somehow fallen away. He stood as in a wide and ruinous apartment, with shattered windows extending almost to the high ceiling. The half-

rotted floor boards were strewn with rubbish, like plaster fallen away from ancient laths. Wind—there was surely wind here, in the very center of Scrope's snug home. Yes, wind, blowing through the cracks in this big wrecked place to which they had somehow been wafted. . . .

"Judge," breathed Scrope, "I know. This is the old mill—it looked like this, before they tore it down—"

"Quiet," bade Pursuivant. He moved in the direction where he remembered the front bedroom's door to be. It was before him now—he felt its knob under his hand though he could not see it. Hinges creaked. They could walk farther into the room that had been part of the razed mill.

Again things were changed to their eyes.

A sort of blue-green light, such as filters down to the bottom of deep water, showed them spacious floor, high ceiling, great windows—but no more in ruins. The room was suddenly fresh, solidly built, a room for living. Painted plaster, broad white sills and jambs, some furry pelts spread like rugs—and furniture. Even in the weird soft glimmer, Pursuivant knew valuable antiques when he saw them. Yonder table was such—dark, stout, gleaming. The chairs, too. The table was spread with white linen, set with silver and china. And somebody—something—was seated there, as if to eat.

The Hessian—of course. Or what had been the Hessian.

It faced them across the table. Now Pursuivant knew where the watery glow come from.

That semi-shape exuded it, like touchwood. He could dimly make out a clarification of outline and detail—a dress coat of ancient British style, powdered hair, elegance strangely out of place upon such a brute body. The most light came from around the head, which still did not have a face.

Pursuivant began to recite once more:

"All ye evil spirits, I forbid you this man's bed, his couch—"

The blue light dimmed. The shape rose and came toward them.

"Scrope," muttered Pursuivant, between phrases of his formula. "Lights—turn them on—"

He put himself where the approaching shape would find him. "I forbid you, in heaven's name—" he continued.

Strong hands seized him, hands as cold as marsh ice. He had a sense of filth and ferocity being hurled at him. He fought back.

JUDGE KEITH PURSUIVANT was big, strong and cunning, but here was his match. It worked those cold hands to his throat, striving to shut off his breath and the words he spoke. He heard it panting and snarling, like the unknown animals of which one dreams. His own fists struck for that featureless face, battering it backward upon its cloudy shoulders, but the thing wrestled closer and closer, trying to throttle him.

"The lights—won't work!" Scrope was screaming. He struck a match, set it to a scrap of paper he whisked out of his pocket. This little torch he held aloft.

The rosy light dominated the blue, and Scrope saw plainly the thing that Pursuivant grappled. He screamed louder, and dropped the blazing paper. It floated sidewise, into some sort of a wall hanging. A stronger flame leaped up. Pursuivant caught the hard, chill wrists of his enemy and tore himself free.

"—unto you and yours, in the name of Trinity!" he finished.

Then he wheeled abruptly, seized and lifted Scrope, and hurried him away. They found themselves in the parlor, the room they had known before. Behind them flames gushed and roared, like a blast furnace.

Scrope, set on his feet again, seemed

ready to faint. Pursuivant shook sense and steadiness back into him.

"Come on," he ordered. "Keep moving. Outside. This place is burning like a wicker basket."

THEY reached the outside, and Pursuivant let Alvin Scrope lean against a tree for support. He himself hurried to the double garage. He started and brought out first one, then the other of the cars, parking them at a point safe from any flying sparks or embers.

He returned to his companion. The flames now burst from the open parlor windows, licking at the clapboards and shingles outside. Snow fell but scantily, barely enough to make a hissing in the heat.

Scrope shook himself, like a dog coming out of water. He was getting command over his fear-crumbling spirit.

"Hadn't we better get to a phone somewhere?" he suggested. "There's a volunteer fire department in town—"

"No," said Pursuivant. "No fire departments. Let that house burn to the ground."

"To the ground?" Scrope's face looked stronger in the red light. "Yes, of course. You're exactly right. No more ghosts after fire. I can build again."

"Build, and be at peace. Let it burn, I say. We'll drive the cars to Scott's Meadows, and stay at the little inn there. And tomorrow you can come and stay with me at my home until you catch hold of your affairs again."

"Thanks. I will."

They fell silent. In the darkness, no longer so chilly, came a rustle of passing. A semi-shape—two semi-shapes—glided swiftly by, like puffs of smoke from the house.

Thank you, Pursuivant felt gentle cries of joy, more in his heart than in his ears. *Thank you—*

They were gone.

Scrope, too, had been aware of that passing. "I guess," he ventured, "that the spirits of those poor women are set free."

From the heart of the red rage of flame that now possessed all the house came suddenly a sound—a shout, a roar, a scream—recognizeable as human and masculine.

Scrope faltered and swore. "That—was the Hessian?"

"It is what was the Hessian," agreed Pursuivant, gazing at the fire.

Another peal of sound. Full of horror—full of agony.

"Why does he stay?" quavered Scrope. "Those others thanked us for setting them free—why does he hang on there until he's burned clear loose from—" He broke off. "I know," he said, gaining command of himself again.

Pursuivant turned toward him. "What, then?"

"The women were killers—yes. But they killed for a good purpose. They knew they'd find some kind of happiness now that they're not held here. But," and Scrope, too, faced the fire, "the other thing has nothing like that to expect. He hangs onto the burning den. Because, when he leaves, it'll be for—for—"

"Something much worse," finished Pursuivant for him.

Once again the suffering voice mounted up and shook the night. Then it died to a wail, a rattle, it died to nothing. It was silent.

The flames flapped like banners of victory. They seemed cleaner and more joyous.

Pursuivant and Scrope suddenly shook hands.

"You've won! I'm confessing, Alicia—confessing that I killed you with arsenic!"

The Music From Infinity

By THORP McCLUSKY

That furious, triumphal piano playing; was it from somewhere in the Infinite—or from the dying brain of a murderer in the electric chair?

"IT'S twenty-five minutes past eleven right now," my good friend John Chambers said, "and at twelve o'clock midnight he's scheduled to die. You know why I got you over here tonight; because you're a screwy piano-player, as screwy as they come, I guess—and God knows if anybody in this world is psychic

or fey—that's what they call it, isn't it?—you are. Have a drink, Jerry?"

I nodded, and relaxed in Chambers' softest armchair as he opened a small liquor cabinet that stood in a corner of his comfortable home—a large and beautifully furnished room on the third and top floor of an establishment that may best be described as a cross between a private club and a bachelor gentlemen's rooming house. The sort of place with a reception room on the first floor, telephone service in each room—swank for minor executives at moderate cost. Just the sort of place for a wifeless young man—

Chambers mixed two whiskey-sodas, handed me mine, and sat down tautly on the davenport, across the room from me. He slept, by the way, on that same davenport—though no one would have ever guessed.

"Here's the story, Jerry," he said, sipping at his drink as he talked. "I haven't told you all of it before for fear you'd laugh. I waited, instead, until tonight. Whatever happens tonight—if it does happen or nothing happens at all, I mean; it'll be over in a hurry, and that'll be the end of it. And if you want to kid me afterward, why, that's your privilege—

"Jerry, I want you to let me tell you this without interruptions. It's confused enough at best, and I want to be as sure as I can that I'm not missing anything that may be—significant. So—"

I nodded; I am a good listener, and after a moment he continued:

"I met this fellow Pierce just about a year ago, when he first came to live here. Kind of a round-faced fellow, with a funny little nervous twisted smile, sort of like a cat's—Lord, you've seen his pictures in the papers enough lately so that I don't have to describe him to you. I'll bet he isn't smiling like that right now, though—"

He shivered slightly, glanced fearfully at the banjo clock on the wall, gulped a big swallow of his drink and went on hastily:

"I struck up a sort of friendship with this Pierce right off. I'm an amiable bird anyway, and I couldn't help getting to know him; there're only about twenty-five fellows living here, and most of us take our breakfasts downstairs every morning, and our dinners at night, too, when we've nothing special on; it's like a sort of club, really.

"Everybody knows everybody else, and everybody else's business, too, so far as that's concerned. So I got to know Pierce right away. Had him up here for a drink, as a matter of fact, the second or third evening after he checked in the place.

"Lord, if anybody'd told me then that he'd done what he'd done I'd have said they were crazy. He seemed the most harmless sort of fellow in the world. The only odd thing that I noticed about him was that he seemed nervous as the devil all the time; jumpy, like — and he always seemed to be sort of listening for something, some noise or sound to materialize that never did. Lots of times I had to repeat whatever I was saying to him two or three times before he'd reply, and even then he'd only answer sort of mechanically, as though he weren't really listening to me at all. Well, it was a damned annoying trait, I can tell you; I put it down to his being terribly absent minded, and I made a private resolution that I'd find out the answer.

"Well, as it happened, I didn't get my first bit of information from Pierce direct; I got it from Mrs. Thomas, our landlady. She'd noticed, I guess, that I'd struck it off with Pierce, and I guess, too, that she'd taken a violent dislike to him. She waylaid me in the hall one day and started in, 'Mr. Chambers, haven't you noticed anything *strange* about our new Mr. Pierce?'

"I told her I hadn't, no.

"She clamped down her jaws and then

snapped, 'The man positively detests music. Hasn't he told you so?'

" 'I can't say that the subject of music has ever been mentioned between us,' I told her.

"Well, she persisted, practically went into a tirade. Yammer, yammer, yammer; I'll reproduce it for you as well as I can. She said, and she was in dead earnest, too, 'Mr. Chambers, that Mr. Pierce, before he would even so much as look at my rooms, told me very emphatically that if there was a piano in the house he wouldn't even consider staying here; said that he hated piano-playing. Of course, as it happens, there isn't a piano on the premises, though I've often considered getting one of those little spinets for the reception room. So I told Mr. Pierce the truth, that there weren't any pianos in the building, and he seemed very pleased, didn't even ask *then* to look at rooms, but paid me a month's lodging in advance and moved in the same day. Mark my words, Mr. Chambers; a man who hates music as much as that isn't normal!'

"I hadn't noticed that Pierce disliked music—though I knew perfectly well that he had peculiarities—and I commented that I'd played the radio in my room lots of times when Pierce was present, and he never seemed upset. Also I mentioned Dowd's banjo playing, down the hall, said that that never seemed to bother Pierce, either.

"WELL, that about terminated the conversation; Mrs. Thomas muttered around a little more and then went off in a huff. I merely had the idea at the time that she'd just taken a violent dislike to her new lodger, and wanted to express that dislike in talking to me; I know now, of course, that she was right, Landladies are uncanny that way.

"Consciously I didn't pay much attention at the time to what Mrs. Thomas had said, but I guess that subconsciously I kept mulling it over. I remember the thought came to me one day all of a sudden that I really didn't know the first damned thing about Pierce—about where he worked, if he did work, who his people were, where he came from, anything. And I realized another thing, too, that that funny mannerism of his of always seeming to be listening nervously for some sound that he never actually heard was getting more pronounced every time I saw him; by thunder after I'd known the fellow about two weeks I began to wonder if maybe Mrs. Thomas wasn't right after all about him. Watching him—and remember that I had plenty of opportunity to do just that, for we were fairly thick there for awhile—I couldn't help but come to the conclusion that either the man possessed such an acutely sensitive ear that the sound of piano playing was torture to him, or he was just plain nuts.

"And neither of those notions exactly fitted the facts, either—for no man who ever lived played a more miserable banjo than Dowd, yet Dowd's banjo practice didn't bother Pierce at all. Nor did piano playing when it came over the radio. But any sort of piano playing, good or bad, popular or classical, that came to his ears direct from the instrument seemed to affect him like the screech of chalk on a blackboard affects a normal person. I've seen him turn white as a sheet at the faintest sound of piano-playing coming from an open apartment window as we walked past; I've even seen him cross the street to avoid passing the open door of our neighborhood music store. That's the way he was all the time he lived here, normal in every respect except when it came to pianos and piano-playing direct from producer to consumer. Music under those circumstances was pure unadulterated torture to him. The more I watched him the more I veered toward the conclusion that he was really crazy, after all.

"Then, one night, it all came out—or so I thought at the time. It was a Saturday night and something or other had happened at the last minute to spoil my date and it was too late then to get any other girl—so I went down the hall to Pierce's room and asked him if he didn't want to take in a movie. I was pretty sure even before I knocked that he'd be there; he very seldom went out; I know now because of that piano music phobia of his. Well, he said all right and we took in the double feature at the Cameo, down the block, and then we went to a beer place to kill the rest of the evening. Funny about that, too; we passed up two fairly decent places for this dump where there wasn't any orchestra—not a piano, even, only a machine; Pierce wouldn't go inside the first two places, just stood outside for a minute and shook his head and dragged me along until we found the last place.

"We stayed there until the place closed and by that time we were feeling pretty good. As a matter of fact we'd both had enough by then, but it was a Saturday night and I didn't have to work on Sunday, so we came back here and I opened up a quart of Scotch and we really went to town. I guess I liked Pierce more then than I ever did, before or since. The drinks had killed that nervousness of his for the time being; he wasn't listening and cringing all the time anymore; he seemed normal as hell. And after a few more shots I did the unpardonable; I asked him point-blank what was the matter with him, why he had such a terrible fear of the sound of piano music. That's what too many drinks can do to a man's discretion.

"THAT question sobered him up like a bullet between the eyes. He stiffened all over for an instant, all the drunken merriment gone out of his face like magic, then he began to tremble—horribly. The way he reacted was ghastly; I've never seen anything quite like it. But after a minute or two he got hold of himself to some extent, and he looked up at me, and there was the most pitiable, haunted expression on that man's face imaginable; twisted and haggard and agonized, like the faces in some of those old Doré illustrations. I'm not exaggerating when I say that his face then was the face of a man damned—utterly without hope and still tormented. That's the significant point; he looked as though his torment wasn't over or would ever be over—but was still going on and on, without any end to it in sight or even hoped for. By the Holy, the sight of his face then gave me the creeps; just the thought of it still does, for that matter.

"Then he began to talk. Heaven knows why, except that I'd been friendly to him, and the nerve strain he was under was too great for him to bear any longer alone. Sooner or later, I guess, he would have had to talk to somebody. It just happened that that somebody was me.

"I'll try to tell you, as nearly as possible in his own words, everything he said. Of course he didn't say all this at once; there were pauses and interruptions and we had more drinks and there were times when I thought he was going to break down entirely. It was four o'clock in the morning before he finished.

" 'I'll tell you, Chambers,' he said, his voice very soft and low and without a tremor in it as he began—though his face was twitching and his hands shaking, 'I haven't known you very long, but you've been a damn good friend and I'll tell you. You know my name is Harry Pierce. There are lots of Harry Pierces in the world, but I'm *the* Harry Pierce—.'

"Well, that didn't mean a thing to me, and I guess my face showed it, for he went on, 'I'm the Harry Pierce whose wife died last August of a—a lingering illness, they called it. Pernicious anemia, the death certificate read. She was a pianist, a profes-

sional—played jazz, but she played it like a concert artist. Her maiden name was Alicia Castle. That's the name she played under—'

"I knew, of course, who Alicia Castle had been—who doesn't?—and I thought immediately that I had the whole story. Loving husband—wife, fine pianist, dies—husband can no longer bear to hear piano music as he had heard it so many times in his home, soft and loud, fragmentary bits, practising, the human side of music that's somehow missing on a record or over the radio. 'Poor devil,' I thought.

"I felt sympathetic, all right. The feeling of intimacy the drinks had built up—and then this confession Pierce had made, that had so dramatically and poignantly explained his peculiar phobia. I tried to be as delicate as possible in my sympathy. I looked down at my hands and murmured, 'She was a wonderful pianist, wasn't she? I remember; she always played *Dancing in the Wind* at the start and finish of her radio programs. And she was your wife—!'

"He didn't seem to be listening. He just sat there across from me, right where you're sitting now, and, like me, he kept looking down at his hands. Only his hands were trembling violently. After a moment he muttered, and his voice was so savage that I almost jumped, *'Dancing in the Wind!* God, how I loathe that piece!'

"I didn't say anything; I was afraid to. And in a minute or two he started up again, and the words just poured out of him.

" 'Hell, Chambers!' he babbled, with the most peculiar, pitiful eagerness, 'ghosts don't exist! They just don't exist, and that's all there is to it. Especially ghosts that don't do anything but just play the piano!'

"He reached for the bottle of Scotch, poured himself a good six ounces, tossed it off in one sobbing gulp that didn't even jar him. He went on talking — raving maybe's the better word.

" 'It's been like that ever since the night she died. Piano playing. *Her* piano playing. I can't mistake it; I know her touch, her style of playing, the licks she used that nobody else can imitate, like I know my own face. It's *her* playing. Nobody else. It's unmistakable, unmistakable, I tell you! And it's been going on ever since the night she died. Whenever I get near a piano, sooner or later I hear her playing. Not all the time; sometimes she plays only one piece, or just part of a piece, and then stops, as though she's been—called away. *Dancing in the Wind,* she plays a lot. She had a special arrangement of it. And—nobody else can hear her. Nobody else can hear her playing. Only me.

" 'It can't be. Such a thing can't be. There aren't ghosts. There can't be ghosts. But when I get near a piano, sooner or later I hear her ghost playing. The night she died I heard her first, playing on the big grand downstairs in the living room. I went down—but before I got downstairs the music stopped. The room was empty—nobody there. But Lucas—he was our butler then—was outside, in the foyer. I asked him who'd been playing the piano in the living room, and he said, "Nobody, Mr. Pierce. I haven't heard a sound from the living room all evening." So I went upstairs again. Twice more that night I heard it—the sound of her playing—and both times nobody else heard it—nobody but me. I asked; I know. The servants were beginning to look at me as though they thought I was queer; I knew they were beginning to talk among themselves. So I shut up—just watched them, watched the people in the house, the friends and relatives who were dropping in all the time to pay their condolences.

" 'Three or four times the next day I heard her playing. Each time I was in the living room — and each time other

people were with me, old friends who had known her well and who wanted to look at her and to look at me too and see for themselves how I was bearing up. God, it was barbaric! The casket stood between the north windows, on the opposite side of the room from the piano. Standing with my back to the piano, standing between my friends looking down into her pale wasted face, I could hear her playing there behind me. But nobody else heard. Nobody else heard! I watched their faces, and I know. To them, the piano was silent. Yet *I* heard it playing, three or four times that day! God! God! God! I know that once I almost fainted when I heard it; Kenny Coates had to grasp my arms and hold me up until I came out of it. He helped me upstairs and gave me brandy and made me lie down for awhile. I was afraid to ask him if he'd heard the music, because I knew he hadn't. I began to wonder if I wasn't going crazy.

" 'And the next day, and the day of the funeral—it was the same. Music that only I heard—Alicia's music—coming from that damnable piano downstairs. I didn't sleep three total hours from the moment she died until they buried her. I was trying to think, trying to fathom out the thing, to keep from going wholly mad. I knew that it was a sort of short circuit in my own brain that was causing the trouble; I kept telling myself over and over that the sounds didn't really exist, or other persons would have heard them. But I knew too that if I didn't conquer the—the sickness—sooner or later I'd go stark raving mad. Part of my brain was sick already; I had to keep the sickness from becoming any worse.

" 'I have will power, plenty of it. But I couldn't overcome this thing. I even forced myself to sit in the living room by the piano, hour after hour, waiting to hear the music, waiting to see if the piano keys would also appear to move. I wanted to find out if my sickness extended as far as hallucination—included my vision as well as my hearing. But whenever I watched the piano, it wouldn't play. It only played when my back was turned—and always when I was in the presence of other people, never when I was alone. It was like a devil in my brain, trying to make me—act ridiculous, strange, mad, in front of my servants and friends.

" 'THE day of the funeral was the worst. Right in the middle of the prayer the music began—*Dancing in the Wind*, again. It kept up all the way through the prayer, until the prayer was finished and the quartette began to sing; I had to bite my lips to keep from screaming. But I have a strong will—I conquered that time. Yet some day I won't—and I'm afraid that then they'll find out my secret and take me away and lock me up as a madman.

" 'After she was—buried, I came back to the house and shut myself in my room. All that night I stayed awake, waiting to hear that music. But there was no music then, not a note. It was just as though my sickness had gone with the people who for three days had filled my house. But I knew that perhaps it was just waiting another—opportunity. . . .

" 'The next afternoon Kenny Coates dropped in. He's my attorney, and one of my best friends; I couldn't refuse to see him. I met him in the library, across the hall from the living room.

" 'Just as soon as we started talking it began again. As always, it seemed to come from the big grand in the living room, and I could hear it plainly, though the two intervening doors were closed. Cutting right into what Kenny was saying, blotting out his words, blotting out all my senses except my hearing, blotting out everything except itself.

" 'I don't know how I looked then, or how I acted, but my reaction must have been pretty ghastly, for the next thing I

remember was Kenny handing me a drink with his face as white as a sheet and saying over and over, "Good God, Harry—you look shot to pieces! For a minute there I thought you were going to fold up. I tell you, you've got to snap out of it, or it won't be long before you follow Alicia. Get away, take a cruise, go to Canada, do anything to try and shake off this nervous condition that's got hold of you. Otherwise—"

" 'I guess I must have been still in a fog for I remember that I asked him, "But the music, Harry! Didn't you hear—the music?"

" 'He shook his head. "Music? What music?"

" 'That clinched it. I knew then that I had to get away. So I did. I turned my business over to a friend—I guess he'd been half anticipating that I'd do just that—and went to Canada, to a little place where I've been going every fall for years to hunt.

" 'I stayed there for three weeks. I was really beginning to feel better; since leaving the city I hadn't once heard that fiendish piano playing. Then, one Saturday night, Pierre Chouinard—he owns the lodge where I was stopping—asked me if I didn't want to go to a barn dance at the village—and some devil in me made me say yes.

" 'When we entered that hall the first thing I noticed was that there was a piano. An old worn-out upright on a makeshift bandstand. The sight of it gave me a queasy feeling for a minute, but the feeling passed off; there was too much noise and merriment and gaiety going on. The orchestra was a couple of fiddlers, a pianist and a drummer. They weren't bad; they played round and square dances mostly, with every once in awhile a waltz, and everybody danced, old and young alike.

" 'At ten o'clock the orchestra took its intermission, and we all lined up in a row for refreshments—ice cream and cake. I was just reaching out my hand for mine—Pierre was standing directly behind me—when the music started.

" 'It came from that old rattletrap on the bandstand. The piece was *Dancing in the Wind*, and it was Alicia playing. No matter how tinny the music was, no matter how distorted by that God-awful out-of-tune instrument with its loose strings and its dead notes, nothing could disguise that. It was Alicia playing, all right, playing that wreck of a piano to me alone. I looked at the bandstand, and there wasn't anybody there. Not even the orchestra; they had all gone off the stand somewhere to smoke and eat their ice cream. Through that hellish music I heard my dish smash on the floor at my feet, and that's the last thing I remembered, then.

" 'I woke up in my bunk in Pierre's cabin, with a raging fever. Pierre wasn't in the room, and I lay there for awhile thinking and trembling. Funny thing, but my thoughts were clear as crystal. I could recollect everything that had happened since I'd left my own house back in the city, and it occurred to me all at once that I had never actually been within hearing distance of a piano in all that time—until the night of the barn dance. I had gone from my house to my train, and from that train to another train, and then I had ridden in an automobile, and then in a wagon, and, of course, in Pierre's lodge there was no piano. I tried to figure it out, figure out what craziness was in me that made me seem to hear Alicia playing, sooner or later, whenever I came near a piano. I remembered clearly that that old rattletrap had seemed to sound exactly like itself, with all its mechanical imperfections and poor tuning, not at all like our big grand. Then I began to wonder if my own couldn't conceivably have twisted its own conception of Alicia's playing to conform to the limitations of this tinny old instrument. The

thing seemed not impossible. If my mind could make me imagine that I heard Alicia playing, it could certainly also make me imagine that I heard her playing various pianos, especially after I had had a good chance to hear each of those instruments. And I had been listening to that decrepit old upright all evening. Certainly no supernatural influence was at work. It was all in my own mind. I remembered a story I had read somewhere about a man who had imagined that a monkey was following him about. The story ended, I believe, with the man slitting his own throat. I made up my mind then and there to get back to the city and consult a psychiatrist—a good one!

"THREE days later I was well enough to travel, so I returned to the city. I didn't go to my own home, but registered at an hotel instead. I was afraid to go back to my own house, full as it was of memories of Alicia — and with that accursed grand piano waiting for me in the downstairs living room. The only way I could have gone home would have been to first have that piano moved out of the house—and I was afraid to do that. Afraid of what people would think and say. The servants had heard me talking queerly, so had Kenny Coates. A hotel was the only solution.

" 'When I registered I asked for a quiet room, isolated from the ballroom and dining room; I told the desk clerk frankly that I couldn't bear the sound of music, especially piano music. The room he gave me was all right; there wasn't a piano within a half-dozen floors of me. But I couldn't stay in that room indefinitely. The first time I came downstairs, as I got off the elevator in the lobby, I heard that devilish piano playing again, coming from the dining room. God! it followed me all the way across the lobby, growing fainter and fainter as I walked away from it; I could hear it up until the instant that I passed through the revolving doors to the street. Then I couldn't hear it anymore.

" 'I went directly to consult a psychiatrist, told him the same story I've told you. He seemed interested as hell, told me that my malady was extremely rare, used a lot of big words and ended up by advising me that my only salvation lay in fighting the thing—

" 'Well, I did just that. I did exactly as this man advised. I didn't go home, because of my—memories of Alicia; but for three months I lived in that accursed hotel, went to my office every day and transacted my business as well as I was able, ate my morning and evening meals in that hotel dining room every day—and listened to that ghastly music pounding in my brain every mortal day in the week! Always in the hotel dining room I heard it—not when the orchestra was playing, of course; only when they were silent between pieces. But I heard it other places, too; through an open window as I was hurrying to catch a subway, a fragment of *Dancing in the Wind* hitting me in the face from the swinging doors of a saloon as I walked past, even from the orchestra pit of a theatre—God!—anywhere and anytime! I haven't gone inside a theatre since, that had a piano; I haven't dared. . . .

" 'For three months I fought it. But I couldn't beat it; I can't beat it. Two weeks ago I finally gave up the fight. I moved out of the hotel, took the room here. For one reason only, because there isn't a piano in the place. When I'm inside these walls I have peace—of a sort; it's only when I go out that I hear the music—and I'm careful about where I go, what streets and even which side of the street I walk on, so that I'm seldom exposed. Maybe the disease will go away of itself in time; I don't know. I only know that I haven't the strength or the courage to fight it any longer. That way would lead to total in-

sanity quicker than the way I have chosen. . . .

" 'That's all, Chambers; everything. Now you know—why I am as I am, why I act as I do. I trust that you will keep this—this confession to yourself'?"

John Chambers, who for almost half an hour had been talking in a steady, quiet monotone as he gave to me, as nearly as possible in Harry Pierce's own words, the peculiar confession Pierce had made to him in this same room twelve months earlier, paused abruptly in his narrative. Without a word, he rose from the davenport, took my glass and his own, walked over to the liquor cabinet and mixed two more drinks. He handed me mine; I nodded without speaking, and he went back to his place and reseated himself. Then he said, his voice still quiet, still restrained, though I knew his thoughts were racing:

"It was good of you to listen to me so long, Jerry, without interrupting. I'm glad you did, for I wanted you to get the complete picture without missing anything, no matter how insignificant some details may seem. There are details which may have vast significance, contrasted with others which may mean nothing; I thought it best to tell you everything that I remembered.

"Well, the rest of the story is told from my own viewpoint; it's exactly what I saw and heard. Pierce never again mentioned his odd confession to me and I of course also refrained from referring to it. And—it was just two weeks later that he finally broke.

"Funny how that came about. One of those jokes of Fate that are always happening and that none of us can foresee or guard against. It happened on a Friday evening, about eleven-thirty; I know it wasn't any later than that because I have to work on Saturday mornings and I was still sitting up, fully dressed, reading—when I heard this awful scream. It wasn't like anything human, I can tell you; it wasn't even recognizable as a man's or a woman's voice—it was more like a—like a fiend screaming in hell or a witch burning at the stake, maybe. It was loud; it stabbed into my ears like a knife—left them ringing for seconds afterward. I was out of my room and down the stairs in nothing flat, and everybody else in the house, too—!

"They were down in the front hall—Harry Pierce and two men who, it turned out, were Kenny Coates and Alicia's brother. Frank Castle, his name was. Frank Castle and this Coates were both holding Pierce by the arms to keep him from sagging to the floor; after that single scream Pierce hadn't screamed any more but there was froth on his lips and dribbling down his chin and his face was white as paper and streaming sweat. And his eyes; God! —they were the eyes of a trapped, maddened beast! And he was mumbling over and over, his mouth lax and drooling, his whole body trembling spasmodically, 'Yes, I did it, Alicia! I'll confess, Alicia; hear me, Alicia; I'll confess! I killed you, killed you with arsenic so slowly that nobody knew. I'll tell now, tell the world now that if they exhume your body they'll find enough arsenic in you to kill a dozen people! Hear me, Alicia; hear me! I'm confessing; God, I'm confessing! It's what you've wanted, all along, I know. You've won, Alicia; you've won; you've beaten me! I'm confessing, Alicia; I'm confessing that I killed you with arsenic—!'

"Over and over and over he went on, like a broken record.

"WELL, except for a few loose ends that's all there is to the story to date that you haven't already read in the papers. The confession came as a total surprise to me, of course, but I can see now how completely it explained things; explained Pierce's terrible nervousness, his peculiar insanity—everything. His conscience was hounding him every minute, day and

night. Through all those months his life must have been a perfect hell.

"It turned out that the three of them had met earlier in the evening, dined—at some place where there was no piano!—and come here afterward.

"Well, you know that the brother demanded that Alicia's body be exhumed, which was done—and they found that sure enough she was saturated with arsenic. Pierce pleaded not guilty on grounds of insanity, but the alienists shot his story full of holes. They examined him and they put him in rooms with pianos, and he tried to fake the malady he said he'd been experiencing all along, and they proved that he was just faking. Then he tried to say that he hadn't heard that ghostly piano-playing any more since the minute he'd confessed, and that only made it worse. The prosecution made a monkey out of him. Proved that his business had been perilously close to the rocks, that he had been inordinately jealous of Alicia because of her radio reputation and because she made more money than he did, and that he'd killed Alicia for her insurance. The jury found him guilty in half an hour, and the judge sentenced him to burn. And tonight's the night. That's why you're here.

"Oh, there's one point that I forgot. Remember I said that the reason Pierce broke when he did was one of those jokes of Fate that nobody can forsee or guard against? Well, the joke was this: that same day, while Pierce was out, Mrs. Thomas bought a piano. A little spinet. She'd always wanted one anyway for the reception room; she didn't like Pierce of course and didn't care a damn whether he stayed on or moved out on account of it; so I suppose when she saw it she merely thought, 'The hell with him,' and ordered it sent out. It came that evening, and it was put in the reception room near the door, not ten feet from where Pierce went haywire as he walked into the house.

"But the real reason I've got you up here tonight, Jerry, is this—

"It may all be imagination, but, thinking back after all the commotion and excitement that night had subsided, I can't get out of my mind the notion that, just before Pierce screamed, I heard somebody playing that piano downstairs! Just a fragment of music, just for an instant, and then the scream blotted it out. Music that had a sort of unreal quality to it, as though someone was playing loudly, but at a great distance—like the music that comes across a lake at night, like, Oh, Lord, this is a lame comparison but it's accurate—like music heard when you hold just the needle to a phonograph record, in your fingers. Diminished almost to nothingness, yet strong and powerful. Microscopic, yet full of fury. You understand? And the piece was *Dancing in the Wind!*

"Jerry, you're here because I believe that I heard that music, that same music that drove Pierce to confess! Maybe it was only an emanation from Pierce's own tortured brain; I don't know. But I am certain that I heard it. There have been times when I thought that I was clairvoyant, Jerry; not tremendously so, like mediums, but just a little bit. And if I'm sensitive at all to such things, I know that you're ten times more so.

"Jerry, I feel that, if it were truly Alicia's spirit driving Harry Pierce to confess through her music, we will hear her play again tonight, for the last time, when he dies. Because she knows that I know the whole story, as no other person on earth knows it. And I feel that if Alicia's spirit exists, and can communicate with us, it will try to get one last message through to me—to let me know—that it lives and that it has triumphed."

I moved uneasily at that, looked down at my glass, which was empty, and shook my head.

"Sorry, John. It doesn't necessarily fol-

ıow—that if you, or I, or both of us, hear this—ghost music—tonight, we've consequently demonstrated the reality of Alicia's spirit—and, naturally, of a whole spirit world. For telepathy *does* exist; we know that—and I can see no way in which we can eliminate beyond doubt the possibility that whatever music we *may* hear—might not have come to us direct from Pierce's brain at the moment of death. The human brain sends out strange and powerful impulses when it is about to die; visions of loved ones, sometimes startlingly vivid and real, sometimes speaking or otherwise transmitting definite messages. There're thousands of authenticated instances. So —whether the music originates with Alicia —or merely in Pierce's dying brain—that's a question we can never answer—"

John Chambers shivered, and his face went gray.

"Jerry! It's four minutes past twelve—and he's to die at midnight—!"

AND in that instant—God!—from downstairs, through that quiet house, came the sound of furious, triumphal piano playing! It was jazz, but what jazz! Sophisticated, transcendental playing, a strong lifting rhythm glittering with embellishments and flying notes that transformed the saccharine melody into a surging clangor of glamorous sound. Not ten jazz pianists in the world could play like that, I knew—and of those ten only Alicia Castle had ever played that particular special arrangement. It was Alicia Castle, all right —playing as I had heard her play innumerable times at the start and finish of her coast-to-coast network broadcasts!

The piece danced along to its conclusion, a sparkling shower of notes that burst and coruscated like a musical skyrocket, and then the music was gone from my brain. The silence that followed was deafening. For a full minute we sat there, neither speaking.

There was no sound in the house; whatever *we* had heard had been heard by nobody else.

Then John Chambers looked at me, and his face was white.

"Did you hear it?" he whispered.

I nodded. "Loud," I croaked. "Loud as hell. *Dancing in the Wind.*"

He licked his lips like a frightened dog. "I only heard it faintly," he muttered. "Just like the other time. You're—you're more psychic than I—"

We sat there dumbly, as though paralyzed, through long minutes. At last John's lips moved.

"Pierce is dead, Jerry; I know it. He died when we heard that music. And—you're right in what you said; we can never know beyond doubt whether that music came from Alicia, somewhere in the infinite, or from his own poor dying brain. It's a thing we'll never know—"

I nodded. It was a thing we would never know—

Again we sat silent. Then, almost musingly and wholly irrelevantly, I spoke the words that were to lead us to—the unbelievable conclusion.

"Funny thing about that damned music, John," I said. "The B flat above middle C didn't play. It was missing, all the way through the piece."

"B flat above middle C?" he echoed. "That's a black note, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"If it's busted on that piano downstairs, and if I know that it's only been busted a few days—that would prove that Pierce, up in the death house, couldn't have known of it, wouldn't it?"

Again I nodded. I was beginning to understand what he was driving at. He jumped to his feet.

"Come on. Wednesday night we were playing poker down there and Bob Ellis' chair went over backward and broke a black key on the piano. Mrs. Thomas doesn't

even know about it yet. We'll see if it's the one."

We went downstairs softly, for it was late and the house was sleeping. We went into the darkened reception room. Chambers didn't wait to turn on the lights. In the darkness I reached out and depressed the B flat. At first gently, then vigorously, I shook the key up and down.

The note was dead—the hammer shaft broken.

In the dim dark I heard Chambers whisper, "It's the one?"

My voice was taut, unnatural, high-pitched as I whispered my reply, "It's the one."

His voice was quivering, too, now, as, with a curious triumphant eagerness, he persisted, "Then it *was* Alicia—who was sending music to our ears from this piano tonight?"

I could feel the flesh crawling along my spine as I sought to formulate my answer. It was incredible, yet there was only one answer, could be only one answer. Then, my lips stiff and dry, my heart palpitating like a triphammer, I spoke—that answer.

"Yes, John. It *was*—Alicia—!"

Witch-Dance

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

AS in the Sabatt's ancient round
With strange and subtle steps you went;
And toward the heavens and toward the ground
Your steeple-shapen hat was bent
As in the sabbat's ancient round.

Between the windy, swirling fire
And all the stillness of the moon,
Sweet witch, you danced at my desire,
Turning some weird and lovely tune
To paces like the swirling fire.

Your supple youth and loveliness
  A glamor left upon the air:
Whether to curse, whether to bless,
  You wove a stronger magic there
With your lithe youth and loveliness.

Upon the earth your paces wrought
  A circle such as magicians made . . .
And still some hidden thing you sought
  With hands desirous, half afraid,
Beyond the ring your paces wrought.

Your fingers, on the smoke and flame,
  Moved in mysterious conjuring,
You seemed to call a silent Name,
  And lifted like an outstretched wing
Your somber gown against the flame.

What darkling and demonian Lord,
  In fear or triumph, did you call?
Ah! was it then that you implored,
  With secret signs equivocal,
The coming of the covens' Lord?

Sweet witch, you conjured forth my heart
  To answer always at your will!
Like Merlin, in some place apart,
  It lies enthralled and captive still:
Sweet witch, you conjured thus my heart!

He started forward across the inner circle—towards her arms. . . .

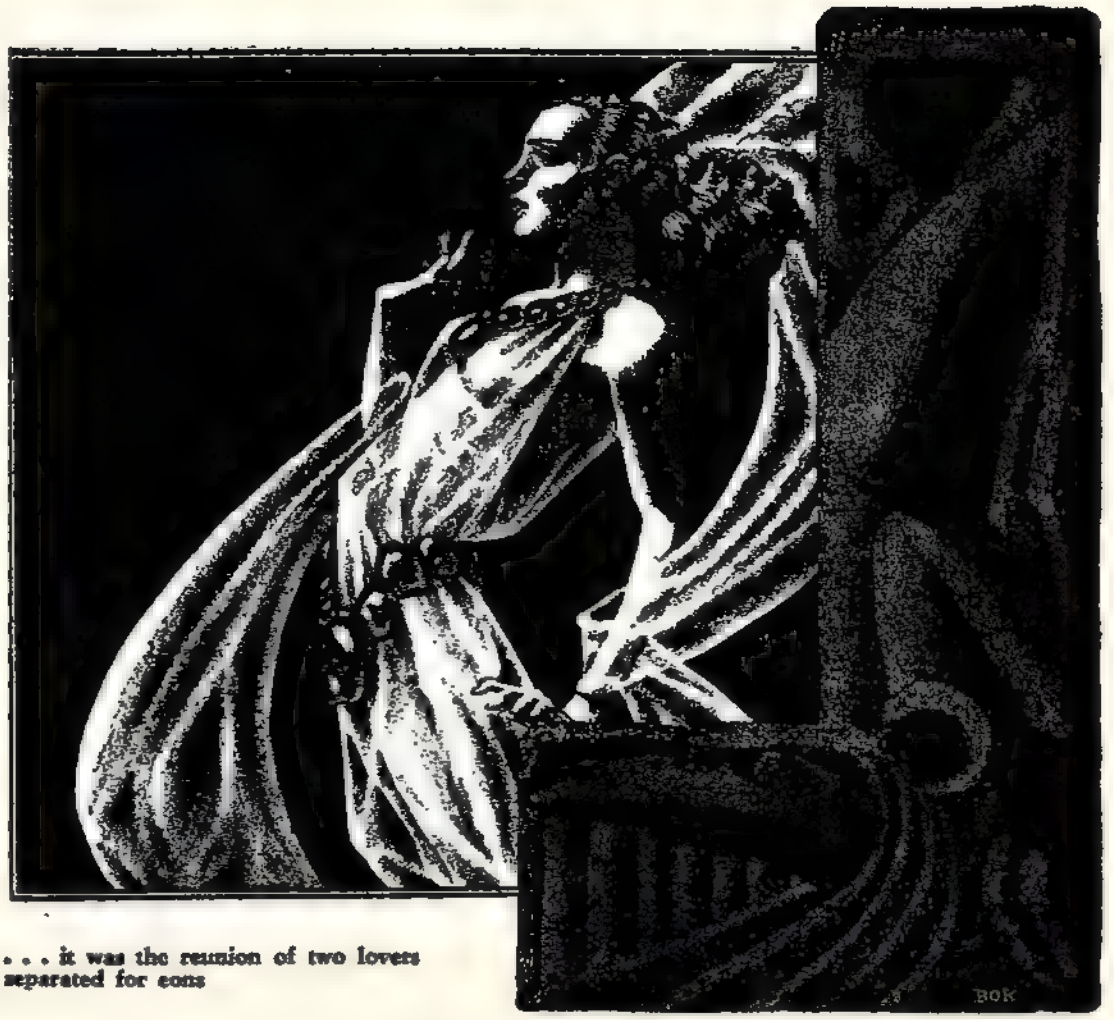
The Lost Gods

IT SEEMED as though everyone entered into a conspiracy to keep me from marrying Harvey Winters. Even Harvey himself.

He asked me to be his wife in stiff, old-fashioned phraseology, almost as though it were against his will, and then before I had a chance to answer, said: "I must tell you that though I love you I am not the man you should marry. I don't think it's in me to make any woman happy because of the Dream Woman."

"The dream woman?" I exclaimed.

"All my life I've had strange dreams of a beautiful, wonderful woman. I can't describe her because her loveliness is beyond words. She comes to me in dreams. I've spent my life searching for her counterpart even though I knew such a glorious being could never be of earth. It always



. . . it was the reunion of two lovers separated for eons

By DOROTHY QUICK

From the backwaters of the Universe came two Beings — radiant, terrible — to challenge the love of a mortal man and woman!

seems as though I'm being pulled to far away places to search for her. That's why I came to Mexico. I'll always worship her in a strange, indefinable way, but I love you, Irene, though I'm not sure I can make you happy—because of *her.*"

I looked at him. His eyes were shining with the faraway look I had often seen in them. He had wonderful eyes, black, deeply set under straight, heavy brows. His mouth was firm, his jaws strong, his nose finely chiselled. His hair grew in blond tight curls all over his head and gave him the look of a Rubens painting.

"I'm not afraid of dreams," I said boldly.

"It's almost as though she were real." Harvey, at least, was honest.

"But she isn't, and you *do* love me," I exclaimed triumphantly.

I lifted my face to his and in the magic of our kiss forgot that some scientist had said, "Dreams are more real than reality until they are shown to be false."

No one was happy over my engagement, and when we announced we were going to be married as soon as the license could be procured, everyone was miserable. If I hadn't been of age my family would have forbidden the match entirely.

"After all, we know nothing about this young man, and he is very strange. Nothing definitely odd, of course, but he's not quite like other people," my mother kept saying. And my father muttered, "If he only wasn't able to support you!"

But he *was* able to support me. He had an assured income of fifteen thousand dollars a year. There was nothing definitely odd as mother had said—no real reason for anyone interfering.

I have often wondered if, knowing what lay ahead, I would still have married Harvey—if I would have had the courage. I might not have been brave enough, so I'm glad that I wasn't able to look into the future. Perhaps the kindest thing God ever did for human beings was to throw a veil over what is to be, and yet, like Pandora, most people are always trying to lift that veil and unloose more trouble for themselves than Pandora let out of her box.

I didn't try to peer into the future. I was too happy in the present. As the days passed, Harvey lost a great deal of the strange detached manner that had been his and became more and more natural. We spent the time, while we waited for the legal formalities to be attended to, exploring the Mexico of the Aztecs. Harvey amazed me with his knowledge of these peoples, their gods and customs. I was particularly interested, for I had come to Mexico especially to see everything I could connected with the Aztecs and Mayans, as I was writing a book on Cortez and his capture of the land that was sheltering us.

When Harvey told me that he had heard of a little known temple that was four or five days' trip into the forests, and asked if I would like to go there for our honeymoon, I was enthusiastic, so Harvey set about making the arrangements.

WE WERE married on a bright, sunshiny day, and, after a modest wedding breakfast, set out on our excursion. Harvey drove his own car, and a second one followed with our supplies, in charge of the Mexicans we had hired to go into the forest with us. When the time came we would have to abandon the automobiles.

For three days I knew happiness beyond my wildest dreams, a happiness so wonderful and so complete it almost made up for the misery that followed.

The fourth night we camped in the woods. I was very tired. We had ridden horseback all afternoon through the thick underbrush, ever since we had abandoned the cars on the outskirts of the forest. We made quite a procession as we struck into the interior. Our guide went first, Harvey and I followed, trailed by five husky Mexicans mounted and leading two extra horses laden with our equipment.

When I could go no further they pitched our camp among great trees that shut out every vestige of light. We sat for a while in front of our tent before we went to bed. The Mexicans had already rolled up in blankets on the ground not far away. Harvey told me legends of the Prince Quatomec who had fought the Spaniards with all the fire Montezuma lacked, and who had been betrayed and hung like a felon in this very forest, perhaps under the very tree that sheltered us. It was a weird tale for a shivery background. I was glad to go to sleep in Harvey's arms.

As I have said I was very tired but despite my fatigue I woke up suddenly feeling as though there were some alien presence in the tent. I could hear Har-

vey's even breathing beside me. I didn't want to wake him, but I had to know if there were really someone—or something—in the tent. I switched on a flashlight I kept under my pillow. The canvas walls contained nothing that had not been there when I went to sleep.

The light hit Harvey's face and when I saw it I caught my breath. He was still asleep but stamped upon his countenance was an expression of ineffable content, and even more, for added to it was a rapture beyond any I had been able to bring to his face.

I knew without telling that he was dreaming of *her*—that *she* was there. I too had felt something in the room; I felt it still.

Then all at once that feeling left me and at the same time the light died away from Harvey's face. He stirred restlessly. "Why? Why do you fr—" he muttered and then fell into a deeper, dreamless sleep.

I switched off my light, buried my head in the pillow and sobbed, my whole being racked with grief. How could I compete with anyone, dream or real, who could bring a look like that to a man's face. It was almost morning before I cried myself to sleep.

THE next day I asked Harvey if he had had a dream and he said no. He said it so furtively that I would have known he lied even if I hadn't seen his beatified expression in the night. Evidently he had made up his mind not to tell me any more about his dream woman. This was an added blow and made me more miserable than ever. I would do my best to fight the dream, but having to fight deceit too made it all the harder. That night I prayed for help to conquer the dream woman and win Harvey's thoughts solely for myself.

About midnight I awoke suddenly as I done the night before. But this time, instead of an alien presence, I sensed danger!

It had been a hot night and we had left the flap of the tent open. In the dim light from the embers of the dying fire I saw Harvey bending over me. His eyes were fixed—the eyes of a sleep-walker. His right hand was raised and something bright and sharp glistened in his hand.

The innate instinct of preservation that is part of us all acted for me—I rolled aside just as the knife came flashing down.

As it buried itself in the mattress I could not prevent the scream that rose involuntarily to my lips.

The next thing I was conscious of was Harvey's puzzled voice: "Irene, Irene—where are you?" and then the voice of Juan, our Mexican guide, anxiously asking: "Señora, what is it?"

I raised myself to hide the dagger in the bed and answered the guide: "I thought I saw something but there's no one here. Will you shut the tent flap, please?"

"Si, Señora. There is no one. I will watch—fear nothing."

The opening was soon covered and Harvey lit our oil lamp. His fingers shook as he held the match.

"What was it? I heard you scream and I woke up to find myself standing by the bed."

I still hid the knife. "Did you dream, Harvey?" I asked.

This time he didn't lie, "Yes—*She* came to me. *She* wanted me to do something." I could see the effort he was making to remember. Then suddenly an expression of horror froze his face. "She wanted me to kill—you—My God! Irene, did I try—"

I moved aside so he could see the knife plunged deep into the mattress where my heart should have been.

Harvey gave one agonized look then dropped on his knees beside me, great sobs racking his body. "Irene, my darling, to think I might have—"

I soothed him as though he had been a little child frightened by the dark. After

a bit he raised tortured, helpless eyes to mine. "What are we to do?"

It was plain he was panic-stricken. So was I. It was a terrible situation. I knew Harvey in his right mind would never hurt me, but a dream-ridden, sleep-walking Harvey—I was afraid, afraid for my love and for my life. The situation had grown too much for me to cope with. I felt beaten spiritually and physically. "You must sleep outside with the men until we get back to civilization and then you must see a psychologist who can cure you of your obsession. That is if you love me, Harvey. The time has come when you must choose between your Dream Woman and me."

"There is no choice, Irene; you are my wife. I will do as you say." His words were all they should be but I sensed a curious withdrawal in them and I knew that the Dream Woman's hold on him was stronger than I had guessed.

"Shall we give up the temple?" he asked.

I shook my head. "We're so near now. Besides if you stay outside at night, I'll be safe."

He took me in his arms, ran his fingers through my black curls, looked into my eyes. "You are so lovely, Irene, so sweet." His lips brushed my cheek.

The triumph of the night was mine, with only the reminder of the knife tucked securely in its sheath to show how nearly it had been *hers*.

The temple was magnificent. When I saw it, I was glad the terror I still felt after my last night's experience hadn't kept me away. Off the beaten track, it was in an almost perfect state of preservation. We spent the morning exploring it and looking at the uncomparable carvings it contained and then had our lunch in the native village that was clustered around the foot of the elevation the temple was built upon.

The people were charming and kindly. I couldn't understand their language but through the guide I made arrangements to spend the night in one of the largest and cleanest mud huts, and engaged one of the women to stay with me as maid. She was to sleep outside the door so I felt comparatively safe. When after lunch Harvey asked if I wanted to explore the small surrounding foothills with him, I assented gladly. I had no fear of Harvey in the daytime.

We left Juan, the guide, in charge of our men, who had already made friends in the village, and started out.

After a bit it was rough going but I was used to tramping and didn't mind.

WE HAD almost reached the summit of the hill Juan had told us commanded a wonderful view of the surrounding country when a rain-storm came up with all the suddenness of the tropics. One minute the sky was bright and clear, the next the whole world seemed wrapped in gloom through which only the flashes of lightning and distant thunder could penetrate.

"It's too late to get back. We'd better find some place to shelter," Harvey remarked as the first drops of rain began to fall.

"I thought I saw a cave a way back," I told him, little knowing that the one glimpse I had had of the hollow in the hillside was going to affect the rest of my life. If I had, I would have gone rushing down the mountain to the village—or would I? That is a question I yet can't answer.

We made our way down the hill through the spattering rain drops that fell faster as we went.

The cave was just where I remembered it and we reached it just in time, for the rain drops had become a beating downpour and the lightning was beyond anything I had ever seen.

The cave was spacious. From a narrow entrance it branched out into unexpected

proportions. We went halfway in and sat down, our backs against the wall. Harvey's arm was around me and I was content, only I hoped the storm would abate before nightfall. I didn't want to stay in the cave alone with Harvey after what had happened that one night.

We were smoking cigarettes and Harvey was telling me about a storm he had seen in India, when there came a terrible crash of thunder that seemed to shake everything within a radius of miles. I could feel the wall behind us tremble. I saw a few loose stones falling in front of the cave's entrance and then, even while I was calling Harvey's attention to them, there was an ominous rumble and we were plunged into complete darkness!

Harvey pulled out his lighter and to our horror we discovered that there had been a landslide and the entrance to the cave was sealed off!

Why my hair didn't turn white in that instant I don't know.

Harvey rose splendidly to the occasion. The first thing to do was to conserve our light, he said, so he built a fire of some dead wood lying around the cave. "The air is fresh. There must be another entrance somewhere. We'll explore," Harvey said calmly.

We set out, using a lighted brand from the fire as a torch.

In the back of the cave was another pile of dirt and stone and what looked like crudely made blocks.

"I believe there was a sealed doorway here and the landslide loosened it," Harvey announced after a quick glance.

It was quite true. One could see evidences of an ancient doorway carved out of stone.

We went through and entered a series of rooms that, while of a cave-like formation, had evidently been fashioned partly by man. From time to time as we went on Harvey discarded one burning stick after another, lighting a fresh one before he stamped the last out.

At last we reached what looked like the end of our journey—a small square room. Harvey was lighting another torch so I looked about. There was something that resembled an altar at the far end, behind it some kind of picture painted on the stone wall. I could vaguely distinguish bright colors. But I could see no exit!

Was this to be the end? Immured in a cave—I felt a slow kind of horror creep over me. I was young, I wanted to live and love.

Harvey's voice, highly pitched with emotion, broke into my thoughts: "Irene—Irene, look—look at the picture!"

He had moved nearer and the light from the burning wood illuminated the wall behind the altar.

It contained rather crudely done in brilliant colors, the painting of a man and woman. They had austere faces of a beauty that defies adjectives. I could mention every one in the dictionary and still not half describe the wonder of those countenances.

I could say their hair was reddish-gold, their skin camellia-like in its quality, their eyes like the deep purple of a violet's petal that is almost black. It would be true but it would be trite compared to the glory of that painting. They were alike, these two, and definitely above ordinary mortals. The man wore only a short length of green material around his loins, held in place by a jewel-studded belt. The woman had a similar belt girdling a green robe which left her shoulders, arms and legs bare and made no attempt to hide the classic lines of her figure. About her throat was a necklace of what looked like uncut emeralds, with one huge stone falling between her breasts. On their faces were expressions of such utter peace and calm strength that I felt as though I should kneel down to worship.

I had actually started to genuflect when Harvey cried:

"It is my Dream Woman at last!"

Simultaneously with his words came again that ominous rumble. Everything began to shake and the next thing I knew it seemed as though the whole world was in upheaval. I was knocked off my feet and flung violently on the ground. The last thing I remember was Harvey falling too, and then I knew nothing more.

WHEN I regained consciousness, the first thing I saw was the space where the picture had been—blue sky with the red streaks of the setting sun across it. The picture and the altar had vanished, leaving a great gap in the mountainside. I looked for Harvey. He was lying close beside me. Somewhat unsteadily I gained my feet discovering I was badly shaken but not hurt. Just as I reached Harvey he opened his eyes.

"The picture?" he gasped.

"Gone. But it has left a way open for us. I think we'd better go before something else happens." I was curt. I couldn't help recalling what he had said before the upheaval hit us.

He groaned. "To think such beauty is destroyed."

As I remember those two beautiful faces, I agreed it was sacrilege but in my inmost heart I was glad. I hadn't yet stopped to figure out how finding the actual representation of his Dream Woman was going to affect our future. I only wanted to get away from the cave.

"Do you see green glittering there?" Harvey asked, pointing. He was on his feet now and I saw his forehead had a cut on it. I tied his handkerchief around it and then followed the direction of his finger.

Where the altar had been there was something green shining.

"Perhaps it's part of the picture. We must save it if we can," Harvey said.

Together we walked over. There was nothing but debris everywhere in this part of the cave but in a hollowed-out section of the ground was a mound of green. I bent down and my fingers touched something cold and hard. I lifted it and discovered I had in my hands the necklace the woman in the picture had worn. Or its counterpart. The stones were uncut emeralds, strung on a gold chain which was knotted in between the stones.

"Her necklace! Irene, do you realize the significance of that? The painting was an actual person. She isn't a dream woman. She's real." I had never seen Harvey so excited.

"She *was*, you mean." I slipped the necklace over my head. The cool stones caressed my skin. "It's a lovely necklace."

"There's something else there." Harvey leaned over. When he straightened up he held the two belts of the picture in his hands. Made of heavy gold they were thickly encrusted with the gleaming emeralds.

He held up the smaller one. "To think this once touched her!" He was like an East Indian devotee who had hypnotized himself.

I felt I must keep to sanity. "Let's hope it's not too small for me." I was matter-of-fact. "These stones, if genuine, must be worth a fortune and I'm sure they are real considering the picture and the ancient look of the altar."

Harvey caught hold of himself. "That was not Aztec work. There was no sign of feathered serpents or any of their symbols. It must have been even older. You are right. We must hide our find. The Mexicans might rob us or the government put in a claim." He handed me the smaller belt. I slipped it on underneath the sweater I wore over my riding breeches. Harvey did likewise with the larger one. Then I put the necklace under the sweater and taking off the bandanna I wore on my head

tied it around my neck so the stones could not be seen.

We searched in the hollow but there was nothing more except some decayed bits of leather, remains of the bag that had held the jewels, probably. We kicked some loose dirt down in the hollow and then climbed out over the debris into the open air. Nothing ever felt so wonderful as the rush of it against me when I finally stepped out on the mountainside.

Harvey poked around to see if he could find a fragment of the picture, but there was nothing, only powdered dust.

"If I could only have preserved her face," he half moaned.

"Then you should have kept her husband's too. Can't you see they were mated, those two glorious beings? Oh, Harvey, forget her—let us be happy together." Even as I said the words, I recognized the futility of what I was urging. I could never forget those faces and I had only seen them once whereas Harvey had been seeing the Dream Woman for years. The outlook for me was pretty bad. Only one thing I could not reconcile—the thought of murder with that pure, austere beauty. Yet she had bidden Harvey kill me. Would she again? What did our finding the picture and the jewels represent? I would have given everything I possessed—except Harvey—to know the answer.

Halfway down the mountain we met Juan and some of our escort. Juan kissed our hands solemnly and after rejoicing over our safety, said: "Ah, Señor, Señora, we feared for you when the Lost Gods spoke."

TWO words picked themselves out in my brain. "Lost Gods?"

"Si Señora, the Gods of the far far past beyond the knowledge of man, they who ruled the lightnings and dreams." Juan was quite serious.

Harvey started. "Tell us more, Juan."

The Mexican made an odd sign with his hand. "We talk little of the Lost Gods, Senor; few except the very old keep their memory green against the time when they shall come again."

"Come again?" Once more I echoed his words.

"My great grandfather knows the legend. The Gods—a man-God and the Woman his mate—ruled the world. Something happened that displeased the man-God. What, no one remembers, for it is too far back into the past. The man-God laid waste the land with his lightning and then took his wife away from earth. But he promised to come back again at the proper time and left a link to earth to make a way back."

"How could he?" I asked although I knew the answer.

"He left his mortal attributes and hers—magic stones set in gold, with their likeness in some secret place. When the time comes, they will be found and then the finder will open the road." Juan's face had the mystical expression that only the superstitious ever have.

The necklace lay heavy against me. "But, Juan," I protested, "That's stupid. Suppose anyone did find the magic stones. They wouldn't know what to do to open the way."

Juan smiled pityingly at my ignorance. "Did I not say the Lost God was the master of dreams, Señora? Whoever finds the stones and wears them through the night will be instructed. But they have been hidden hundreds of years, beyond the reach of time; they will not be found in our life, lady." His white teeth flashed as he laughed at his own joke.

He little knew! I could tell by Harvey's rapt expression he believed every word. As for me my thoughts were in chaos. I could not find my way out. Only one thing I knew that at night I would sleep with the necklace about my neck and the girdle round my waist.

I followed out my resolution but nothing happened—nothing. I slept a deep, dreamless sleep and had the first really good night I had had since I saw Harvey dreaming of the Lost Goddess—to give the Dream Woman her proper title.

Harvey entered the mud hut as I finished my breakfast.

One look at him and I knew something unusual had happened. He was seething with excitement.

"Irene, it's all true," he exclaimed. "Every word Juan said. Last night I dreamed—not of *her*"—the way he said the pronoun made me crawl with jealousy—"but of him, the Lost God. He came to me and told me what to do. You must help me, Irene. Think how wonderful it will be to see those shining ones in the flesh—to bring them back to rule the world!"

"I like the world as it is—Oh, Harvey!" I caught his hands. "Can't we forget all this? It's an ordinary legend and it's preyed on your mind to the extent you did dream of him but that doesn't mean there's truth, in the dream or the story. It's too utterly fantastic."

"The picture and the jewels were real."

He had me there.

"Don't you see, Irene? This is my mission in life. What I was born for—to be the opener of the way. That's why I've always dreamed of her. I understand now why I have been a man tortured and divided by loving two women. It was to spur me on. I will always worship the Lost Goddess but it is you that I really love. I know mortals cannot mate with Gods. But I can serve her; so can you. We can worship them together—will you, Irene?"

"Yes, Harvey," I heard myself saying. I could never resist the pleading in his voice. I didn't remind him that his Goddess had urged him to kill me, because I had decided in one swift moment I would rather die than go on sharing Harvey with her. Besides if he did as his dreams commanded and nothing happened the ghost would be laid. And if the Gods materialized I had faith in the man-God to manage his wife. The Lost God's face had haunted me ever since I had seen it pictured on the wall. It had drawn me with a strange fascination that I struggled against and even now would not admit. I loved Harvey but my heart beat faster at the thought of actually seeing the Lost God.

Somehow I was no longer afraid.

WE GOT back to Mexico City without any further happening worth recording.

Harvey continued to dream. Each night the God came to him and gave him instruction as to what he was to do, all of which Harvey wrote down and kept from me. To my great satisfaction the Goddess didn't ever figure in his dreams. Nor did he seem to miss her presence. I began to hope.

We motored back with the family and the Mexican custom officers little suspected the precious antiques we were smuggling out of their country, which we hid under the hood of our car.

We settled in our new house on father's estate at Locust Valley. Harvey took two emeralds from the girdle of the Goddess which I still wore, and sold them for a fabulous sum on the Dream God's instructions. What the other stones and the necklace would be worth was almost beyond comprehension. With part of the money Harvey bought land on the ocean front between Southampton and Quogue. Ostensibly he began to build a summer home. Only he and I knew it was a home for the Lost Gods, built entirely on their specifications. I was not to see it until it was ready for Harvey and I to perform the last final ceremony for the opening of the way.

Harvey was calmer and less mystical than I had ever seen him. He clung to me and we were quite happy. By tacit consent

we occupied different rooms at night. I was no longer afraid but I saw no use in taking chances.

I even went so far as to consult an eminent brain specialist who was an old family friend. I had had my dark moments of doubt as to Harvey's sanity, but after observing him, Dr. Harlow said he was perfectly sane. "It's the long arm of coincidence," he reassured me. "Harvey dreamt of a woman, probably a fixation from some childish experience. When he saw the picture he immediately invested it with the personality of this dream woman, and after hearing the legend, his sensitive mind transferred his dreams from the woman to the man. Let him go ahead with his experiment—nothing will come of it. But you will have peace afterward plus a summer home and a fortune in jewels."

This contented me. It was my own reasoning and there was no one to point out how terribly wrong we both were.

EVERYTHING was prepared and ready the week before Christmas, so Harvey and I left for Southampton in his new Rolls Royce. He had of course gotten the best of everything for the God's use when they appeared. We promised the family, who had grown much attached to Harvey by now, we would be back in plenty of time for Christmas and they waved us off, little knowing what lay at the end of our road.

Harvey drove at a tremendous rate of speed. "There is much to do when we arrive," he explained, and added: "*He* was particular about the time."

I couldn't help the thought that if it hadn't been for Doctor Harlow I should have considered myself mad to go with Harvey—a Harvey who had always been strange, who had tried to kill me once and might again with some unholy rite in the God's service. But I had long ago made up my mind I would rather die than continue as we were and I firmly believed nothing would happen. Besides if it did, if the Shining Beings materialized, I had faith in the Lost God.

We tore through the sleepy town of Southampton until we left the houses with lights in them behind us and reached the ocean road where the untenanted homes of the summer people loomed darkly. I had never been there except when the summer colony was in residence. The end of December found this part of Southampton a deserted village. The huge empty houses looked strangely sinister and forbidding in the cold twilight. As we rode on and on they became fewer and farther apart until at last there were none at all, only the dunes stretching down to the ocean on one side, and on the other the long green marshes running toward Shinnecock Bay.

There was no sign of life anywhere except an occasional wheeling gull against the gray sky. I had never thought that part of Long Island could be sinister but it was.

All at once we turned in between two heavy wooden gates set in a high stone wall. "This is the place I built according to the Gods' instructions." Harvey broke the long silence and the sound of his voice was a relief.

At the same moment I saw the house, a strange modernistic looking affair which had an affinity with the houses of ancient Egypt in the huge pylons either side of the bronze doors. Harvey left the car in a garage near the gate and we walked up the long drive to the house. Then Harvey took me inside a corridor and let me look into the central room which really was the house. It was huge, two stories high, with a glass ceiling through which one could see the sky. The wall facing the ocean was glass too, crystal clear. In the dim light I could still distinguish the waves leaping upon the shore below.

The other walls were hung with damask of a soft indefinite shade of ice green.

There was a velvet couch at the center of the long wall and before it something that looked exactly like the altar in the cave.

The rest of the room contained little furniture—an oddly carved chest and a few chairs. The floor was covered with a thick green carpet of the same illusive shade as the walls.

I saw all this in the second that Harvey pulled aside the damask drapery for me to look. Then he let it fall to again, shutting the room off. "We cannot enter there now," he said firmly.

The house was odd enough. The big room was its core. Around it ran a corridor six feet wide from which other rooms opened, enclosing the whole in a big square. Harvey showed me to a very pretty bedroom which had a modern bathroom attached.

On a chair was laid a pile of green chiffon. Harvey pointed to it. "If you'll rest an hour and then put this on, we can go back to the big room and wait the time."

I might have been a stranger for there was no personal touch in Harvey's tones. I nodded and he left telling me he would call me in time. I couldn't rest. I lay on the bed thinking of Harvey utterly obsessed with a pictured face, and of myself too, for I could see the Lost God's features line for line. I wished the Gods would come long enough to free us from this obsession and then return to the starry spaces.

I felt strangely keyed up and my mind darted hither and thither like a restless swallow until I could not focus it on any subject.

It was a relief to hear Harvey's knock on the door and his, "Hurry, it is nearly time!"

I called out that I would. Harvey didn't come in so I struggled into the garment he had left on the chair. It was patterned after the robe of the Lost Goddess, made of several layers of various colored green chiffons. I slipped it over my head and fastened it around my waist with *Her* girdle. The necklace was already on my neck, the necklace which *She* had worn. As a last touch I put my feet into odd looking sandals of gilded leather.

Then I looked at myself in the long mirror set into the door.

The strange costume was becoming. Through the layers of chiffon I could glimpse the flesh tones of my skin. My bare legs were straight and slim. I looked like a temple neophyte with my black curls clustering about my face. I had not the radiant beauty of the Goddess but at least I wouldn't shame Harvey.

Slowly I went out into the corridor. Harvey was waiting—a Harvey who looked handsomer than I had ever seen him. He wore a short length of green material wrapped around his hips, held at his waist with the jeweled girdle. It fell to a point a little above his knees. His legs were straight and firm, his physique marvelous. I found myself wishing that we could forget this foolishness of Lost Gods and think only of ourselves. As Harvey surveyed me, I was glad my figure was fine enough to stand the revelations of the close clinging garment he had given me to wear. He took my hand and led me along the corridor. My heart beat faster as we went.

I had made up my mind to humor him, come what would. If nothing happened, then I meant to claim him as my own. It was a lucky thing I could not foresee how I would claim him nor what would happen when I did.

HARVEY opened a thick heavy door in the corridor and pulled aside folds of green damask for me. I entered the big room.

As I did so, I heard the clang of the great door shutting behind us and when I looked back Harvey stood beside me and the wall was entirely green damask. I

couldn't distinguish where the material that covered the door parted.

The room was slightly different. Great ecclesiastical candles in bronze holders burned on either side of the altar-like table and lit the room in an eery fashion.

Before the altar was a low bowl in which incense was burning and encompassing the whole thing, altar, brazier, candles and all was a large circle made of strips of gold. Outside of that were inverted golden triangles and then another circle encompassing the first. How Harvey had managed to get so much gold at a time when gold was so scarce I didn't know.

"Now," Harvey said firmly, "put the necklace and the girdle on the altar as I do. Then come back and stand between the outer and inner circle. No matter what happens, do not cross the inside circle again for it would mean death to any but the Gods."

I put my hands up to lift the necklace over my head. I hated to part with the lovely thing. It had been my constant companion, and I had grown fond of it. Still I felt I was not being separated from it for long so I laid it upon the altar and then unclasped the girdle and placed it beside the necklace. Harvey at the same time put his belt beside mine on the altar and I noticed that he had had another belt underneath.

He uttered some strange cabalistic words in a tongue I did not understand and then motioned me to go back to my place between the golden rings. As I went he followed me. We stood inside the two circles, Harvey opposite one candelabrum while I faced the other.

Then Harvey leaned forward and, with unerring aim, threw something he took out of his belt into the bowl. A soft swirling smoke rose from it, almost like sea mist. It billowed around the inner circle and gradually spread to the other one, until it enveloped Harvey and me. I could no longer see the strange, mystical passes Harvey was making with his hands, but I could hear his voice intoning unfamiliar words. And beyond his voice the sound of the sea pounding on the shore—a deep, minor undertone that had a rhythmic quality.

I forgot everything but the solemnity of the occasion and the mist from the bowl caressed me as though it were composed of soft human fingers dipped in perfume.

All at once I felt as though the mist, the sea, and I were all fused together. As though I were a part of them, that I was above and beyond myself.

A shudder passed over my body that was almost cataclysmic. Then I felt something alien taking possession of me. It was as though an essence was being poured into my soul, as though some part of me that had always been lacking had come home. A strange power surged through me. I felt attuned to nature. Even more, I was part of nature. I knew all her secrets. Suddenly I knew I was more than human—I was a Goddess—The Lost Goddess.

Now I understood what Harvey was saying: "By the power of the word, the unmentionable word which I have spoken, I call you back from the far places. O Gods that were lost, by your promise to come again I invoke your presence!"

The words were in a strange, archaic tongue but I knew their meaning. I knew the word too, the unmentionable word. It was a part of me. Perhaps I was dreaming—but something impelled me to move forward. The mist parted to let me pass. I slipped into the inner circle. I crossed the line and I still lived. Then I knew it was no dream. I was truly the Goddess. I took the necklace and drew it over my head until it hung about my neck and the largest emerald rested between my breasts. I put on the girdle and as I did so the mist bowed low before me and died away.

In the outer circle Harvey was kneeling. As I looked at him I knew the past

and the present, knew that far back beyond the minds of men I had loved him and because a Goddess cannot love a human I had been taken from earth by the jealous God who loved me. Knew that I had put off my Godhead to come back to earth to find my lover age after age and that as Irene I had found him and won him. But he had in his soul remembered the Goddess he had loved in the past and he had gone to find her and as things were ordained discovered the one thing that could bring her back. Now he had called my Godhead to life again and fused together the twin parts. I was a woman and a Goddess, and both woman and Goddess loved him. Strange that I had never guessed.

"Harvey!" I called and my ears hardly knew my own voice, it had become so mellow and lovely. "Harvey, my love!"

He looked up. "Most glorious!" he cried, then more puzzled: "Irene—Irene, are you—you *are* the Lost Goddess!"

I wish I could have seen myself at that moment.

I smiled at him and my smile promised all things. "Come to me, my beloved."

He started forward. As he came I caught a reflection of myself in the copper bowl and saw that I was beautiful with an unearthly brilliance that was indescribable. I was still human enough to be pleased and to relish the homage in Harvey's eyes.

"It is true. You are the Goddess. No wonder I loved you," Harvey cried.

"Come my beloved, come!" I stretched out my arms to him.

He stumbled across the inner circle and into my arms.

"To touch you—" he whispered, "to see your face—"

I clasped him in my arms. I pressed my lips to his and kissed him. It was a wonderful kiss, the perfect reunion of two lovers, separated for eons. But as it ended I felt him go limp in my arms. I lowered him to the floor and bent over him. He lay white and still and the awful truth came to me. The force that was in me had killed my lover! Gods and humans cannot mate, or even kiss.

As this agonizing knowledge came to me I heard a low laugh and a new voice beat on my ears: "At last—at last!"

I had forgotten the Lost God!

There he stood in the inner circle on the other side of Harvey's prostrate body fastening the belt around his waist. Tall, majestic, with the same unearthly beauty that I possessed illuminating his countenance. But his was the cold beauty of a statue. There was no warm, pulsing humanity to temper it. I wondered how I could ever have been drawn to him even in my thoughts.

"So we meet again, my Goddess," he said, "and I owe the meeting to your lover." He touched Harvey's inanimate body with his foot.

I straightened up. "Stop or I will send you back whence you came!"

It must have been no idle threat for I saw him pause. "We will go back together," he said, "there is nothing in this cold, bleak world to hold us. We should never have left it for it was better in the old days. But I had to take you from him. I was wrong then. I should have annihilated him but I didn't know a Goddess would stoop to put aside her Godhead for a creature such as this." He looked at Harvey again.

"I loved him then, I love him now," I said simply. "You were cruel, you still are, Eater of Blood. My hate for you survives."

"He is lost to you now. You have repaid his love with death. A kindly death with your lips on his. I should be jealous but I am not. Come, we waste time. Ever since you left me I have schemed to find you but I couldn't mate with mortal. You had to resume your Godhead before you

could be mine again, or leave the mortal body you had selected. That fool played into my hands. I sent him dreams from the time he was born again. He found you as I knew he would. I tried to make him kill your mortal frame and send you back to the Outer Space and me, but you prevented that. Your Godhead watched over you, for you had only put it aside. So I had to make him bring your Godhead back to the body you chose. I did my work well. And you played into my hands.

"Now he is finished, and you are mine once more!" He smiled coldly and stretched out his hand.

I knew to what he would take me. Being a Goddess I knew all things. Once before in the dim, legendary past I had fought with him and lost because his power was as strong as mine and he was wiser. But now to my Godhead was added human wisdom and love.

A line came to me: "A God is as real as the belief of his worshippers." Harvey's belief was a weapon in my hand. It was I he had worshipped in his heart, not the Lost God, and I had drawn Harvey's strength into me with that death-dealing kiss.

I bent over. I lifted Harvey in my arms as easily as though he had been a child instead of a man, for my strength was superhuman. I held him against my hip with one arm and standing thus faced the Lost God.

"No!" I cried, my voice ringing with awe-inspiring power. "No, if I must I will renounce my Godhead forever, but before I do, I will send you back, back to the far spaces, from which never again will a worshipper draw you hence!"

"So once more we struggle!" His voice matched mine. "So be it. This time I will win forever."

He raised his hands and let loose the forces of nature. A storm arose such as I have never heard. The ocean lashed, peal after peal of thunder shook the room, lightning flashed all about us.

"Go—" I cried again. "No one has faith in you, not even I!"

I saw him fall back and then I exerted every atom of the power that I possessed. "Go, my Godhead," I shouted above the storm. "Go forever and take him with you."

I felt as though something were tearing through my being. There was a terrific wrench, a cataclysmic shudder as though some vital thing were being forced from me. At the same time came a clap of thunder and an awful streak of lightning.

IN IT I saw the Lost God, saw the reproach and defeat on his face. Then he was gone and I was Irene again. Plain Irene, no longer a Goddess but a human girl trying to hold up the insupportable weight Harvey had become. The moment I realized this I saw that behind me the green damask was in flames.

Now indeed I regretted my lost Godhead. I dragged Harvey over to where I thought the door would be.

After agonizing moments, while the flames leaped higher and crept nearer to me I found the door. I got Harvey out into the corridor away from the house, down the hill to the garage. A little superhuman strength must have been left to me for somehow or other I got him into the car.

Fortunately the key was in it and I could drive. As I went through the gates I looked back. The house on the Dunes was a mass of flame.

Why, believing as I did Harvey was dead, I went directly to a doctor in the village, I don't know, but I did and the doctor said Harvey had been struck by lightning. He applied first aid, and after working on him for hours, brought him back to life.

I shall never forget the moment when

Harvey's eyes opened, looked into mine, and his voice murmured weakly: "My love!"

We stayed what was left of that night with the doctor. I explained our fantastic costumes by saying we'd been to a fancy dress party up on the Island and had just returned to Harvey's house when it was struck by lightning.

By then of course the whole town knew of the fire.

"Likely the same bolt that struck your husband," the doctor said. "Never heard of a thunder storm before, this time of the year; strange unseasonable weather."

Only Harvey and I knew there had been no lightning when he had been smitten, only the burning force that had been in me.

The doctor and his wife fixed us up with clothes and we left the next day for Locust Valley. I still wore the emerald necklace but the girdle reposed in Harvey's pocket. The other had gone with the God. As we crossed the bridge over Shinnecock Bay, Harvey pulled over to the rail, looked down at the water below, and took out the girdle. "Shall I?" he asked, holding it poised in the window.

I looked at its unearthly beauty and then nodded. A quick throw and it was gone—far below the swirling waters.

I took off the necklace, detached the hanging stone and then gave it to Harvey. "The one stone I will keep but the rest must go." While we held these things there was always danger. They were the last link with my Godhead, and we could not keep them for fear they might prove once more a pathway.

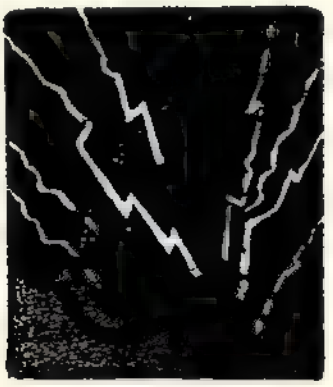
"It's gone!" Harvey said. There was no regret in his voice, though he had thrown away a fortune. I put my hand in his.

"Are you happy, Harvey?"

"Happier than I dreamed," Harvey smiled. "I have my Goddess and my love, and they are both one."

I looked at him and knew I had no regrets for my lost Godhead. I would never be a Goddess again, but I would live and die with the man I loved.

Harvey leaned over and our lips met. And that instant I knew that my life really began.



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See page 23 for full details.

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Your NOVEMBER Number of WEIRD TALES Goes on Sale September 1st

Fantasy Versus Philosophy

RECENTLY Mr. Howard Brenton MacDonald, M.A., of Yonkers, N. Y., wrote us a very interesting letter about Reincarnation and its rather involved by-paths, pointing out that Robert Bloch—in his story *Beauty's Beast* (May issue)—had, in his opinion, got his philosophy rather mixed up; so we sent his letter on for Mr. Bloch's answer. First, here is the philosopher's side of things:

In *Beauty's Beast* Robert Bloch has his Hindu philosophy a trifle mixed. He is confusing Transmigration with Reincarnation when he says that the souls of humans go into animals. The pure Doctrine of Reincarnation, which is one of the oldest and greatest of all human teachings, says that the human soul passes through a series of *human bodies*, in a sort of spiritual evolution until, having learned all there is to know, it merges in with God at the end of its Cycle of Necessity. Transmigration is a degraded perversion of this in that it says that human souls may be born again in animal bodies. This, however, is not accepted by any serious-minded Hindu authority, or student, although it is held by many uneducated people in India. But even granting the idea of Transmigration, Mr. Bloch is at fault in saying that means that a human soul can pass directly into the body of a living animal, as is the case in his story; because no doctrine of the Orient that I know of teaches such. If it goes into an animal at all (and only Transmigration teaches this) the soul does so into the body of a newly born creature, not a living one such as the snake or monkey in his yarn.

Reincarnation likewise is concerned only with the journey of the human soul through earthly human bodies, and not through the lower kingdoms. In the lower forms of life there is no such thing as an individual, or individualized personality. Cats, dogs, plants, and minerals all have one large soul apiece; but no animal, plant, or mineral has a separate individual soul such as a human being has.

This is a very complicated question, but a most fascinating one. I have enjoyed all of Mr. Bloch's stories in the past, and am now delighted to see that he has become interested in the Hindu philosophies. If Mr. Bloch will continue his studies of Hindutism, Yoga, and Oriental occultism, he will find enough material for a thousand weird tales. So can all writers.

And now, here is—

The Author's Viewpoint

IT WAS with considerable interest that I noted the remarks of Mr. Howard B. MacDonald regarding *Beauty's Beast*. I am in total accord with his findings, except for the first sentence, in which he declares I have my Hindu philosophy "a trifle mixed."

I choose to resent that. My Hindu philosophy was not a trifle mixed, but *completely* mixed. More than a mere confusion of Transmigration with Reincarnation, but an almost complete hash of both concepts. Reader MacDonald is to be congratulated upon his astuteness in this matter.

However, I plead guilty on counts of willful premeditation. I am aware, as Mr. MacDonald points out, that Transmigration is a sort of degraded perversion of the doctrine of Reincarnation—and for the sake of the yarn I perverted it further. The tale dealt, you may remember, with a priest of Yama—the equivalent of an Occidental devil-worshipper. Devil-worship certainly is a religious perversion. Its doctrines are definitely at odds with recognized Christian theology. Yet in a weird tale,

we accept the tenets of the devil-worshippers for the sake of the story, and do not demand that their beliefs accord with established religion. So my Hindu devil-worshipper has his own concept of the Reincarnation-Transmigration principle, and carries out his rites accordingly.

As an author I took the liberty to construct my own supernatural background to serve the plot—but I certainly don't disagree with Mr. MacDonald's lucid exposition of the actual facts.

Similarly, in this month's story, *A Sorcerer Runs for Sheriff*, I've again played fast and loose with medieval goety. The methods employed by the poppet-maker are enough to make any orthodox witch blush in horror—and I know, because several orthodox witches of my acquaintance did. "You can't kill a man that way," they protested. "It's sacrilege!"

"Oh, can't I?" I sneered. "As long as there's paper in this typewriter, I'll kill people any way I please."

They put a curse on me and went away, grumbling. But I stuck to my guns—maintaining that in the disputed field of fantasy any variation on a known legend, myth-pattern, or psychological concept is permissible, provided that it does not strain the reader's credulity. Nothing in any yarn should be at all fantastic or unbelievable. Everything must be factual. Realism, that's what it is. Plain, unvarnished truth. Never tell any whoppers.

I'm sure the readers of my yarns know what I mean. I'm content to write plain, simple, homey, every-day little stories. About things that could happen to you, to anybody. Nothing *wild*—heaven forbid!

In that spirit, *A Sorcerer Runs for Sheriff* is offered. If any reader disbelieves the tenets therein, I ask him merely to go out, buy himself a pound of wax, and start modelling. If his enemy doesn't die in three days, he might just as well demand his money back. Me, I've killed hundreds that way. Literally hundreds. I intend to kill hundreds more, if my typewriter paper holds out. And the patience of the readers.

ROBERT BLOCH

Vote of Thanks from Down Under

David R. Evans writes from New South Wales, Australia:

Will you please grant me the privilege of using the Eyrie to thank Seabury Quinn for so many enjoyable hours spent with him per medium of WEIRD TALES?

If I can encroach on your leniency further I would consider it a personal favor if you allowed me to convey similar appreciation to Robert Bloch. Will you consider me presumptuous if I begged further space to thank also your artists for their excellent illustrations of the stories I have enjoyed reading in WEIRD TALES?

Irrespective of the ban here on American magazines, I find that I am able to procure copies of WEIRD TALES through the combined kindness of Australian and American fans; the contents of whose mail is sometimes confiscated by the authorities here. However, our love for WEIRD TALES does find a way.

In closing, I would also like to offer you my most sincere thanks for your keen sense of editorship as evidenced in recent issues of WEIRD TALES.

Thank you.

On Borrowed Time

From Decatur, Alabama, R. Cornelius Jones writes:

I am pausing long enough in my reading of Lovecraft's novel, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* to tell you that it is absolutely the most enthralling weird novel I have seen in some time and that I can guarantee to anyone, weird fan or not, that they would enjoy it to the fullest.

And now, back to my reading.

"Madam Zombi"

Annetta Richardson writes from Gary, Indiana:

May I tell you about my Inner Sanctum musing:

Ghastly figures danced across the wall, long eerie shadows, headless forms that wound themselves around mysterious pinnacles of thin air like coiled snakes, things that whirled and leaped—all shadows from the paling light that was flickering out.

I felt fiendishly happy and lit another tall candle, picked up my copy of WEIRD TALES from the mirror-top table beside me and began another story adventure.

Ever since that night I've been envolved in this devilish delight at the solemn stroke of 11—on Thursday nights—demons and devils come groping boldly out of the pages of the book and live in my agile imagination for an hour or two.

"MADAM ZOMBI"

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• A membership card carrying the above design—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

"Ghoulish" Anticipation

A couple of issues back we posted a little announcement. Naturally we were happy to receive our cards, the two of us fans. Mighty happy indeed were we to find a couple of interested fans in this locale. However, who would have anticipated a club with twenty members in the short space of two months!

We are very reluctant to stop at such a number, though, and believe that this is just a hint of what is to come.

We cater to zombies, black sheep, the mentally unbalanced, and even normal fans. Come on—rip our library to pieces, get a membership card, lick our stickers, read our club publication, meet authors, artists, top fans, and amateur editors.

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Mrs. Geo. G. Conklin, Bridgeport, Connecticut, writes:

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Announcement by Los Angeles Fantasy Society

As secretary of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society I am writing this letter to announce that the L. A. S. F. S. wishes to affiliate with the WEIRD TALES CLUB and would appreciate your acknowledgment.

Due to our notice several issues ago in your magazine we have been in receipt of three inquiries and six visitors. In view of this it was deemed advisable to affiliate with the WEIRD TALES CLUB.

Our Society, known to followers of this department as "The Insiders," has among its prominent members Forrest J. Ackerman, Walter J. Daugherty, Arthur Joquel, Morojo, and Paul Freehafer, who are already members of your club.

We would like to remind all local fans that they are welcome to attend each and every meeting. The meetings are held every Thursday evening from 7 o'clock on at Clifton's Cafeteria, 648 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, Cal.

Edwin N. Chamberlain,
Secretary, L. A. S. F. S.

1151 W. 107th Street,
Los Angeles, California.

World Science Fiction Convention

And as we go to press, word comes in from the Colorado Fantasy Society that the World's Science Fiction Convention—sponsored by them—is being held in Denver, Colorado, on July 4th, 5th and 6th. We would like to extend, on behalf of all the members of the WEIRD TALES CLUB, our best wishes for the convention's success.

Free Horoscopes

I am a non-professional student of astrology. If any of your readers are interested in this subject I should be glad to cast and delineate the horoscopes of the first five people who write to me. In return, I want only that the people whose horoscopes are cast write and give me their opinion of my interpretation. The necessary data are the day and hour of birth and the birthplace.

George Patrick.

613 Terrace Place,
Schenectady, New York.

Hogs—and Weird Books

Please enroll me on the club roster. I am twenty-one years of age, live on a farm and raise hogs—but I am no "hick." My pet hobby is book-collecting, especially books of weird and occult character and am sincerely interested in the beliefs and opinions of other addicts.

Bob Carson,

Route 1, Rich Hill, Missouri.

NEW MEMBERS

Anthony V. Asser, 7 Granite Ave., Staten Island, N.Y.
Charles McDowell, Jr., 143 South Washington Ave., Pulaski, Va.
Karl D. Rist, 4 Forest St., Baldwinsville, Mass.
Virginia Allen, Box 149, Pelzer, South Carolina.
R. E. Stark, 385 Golf St., Sarasota, Fla.
Wm. M. Nelson, 1316 Summit St., Kansas City, Mo.
A. Rand, 526 S. El Paso St., El Paso, Texas
Robert W. Pickworth, 18 Akron St., Rochester, N.Y.
Eleanor Teklinski, 93 Oak St., Natrona, Pa.
Walter G. Curtis, 68 George St., Roxbury, Mass.
Allan Gifford Keniston, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine.
Mario Alessandro, 301 Channel St., Stockton, Calif.
Prynce Wheeler, 203½ 1st Avenue South, Great Falls, Montana
B. Britten Chambless, Route 1, Box 9K, Texarkana, Texas
Mrs. Lois Sandbeck, Box 632, Seward, Alaska
Gordon E. Wykes, U. S. Naval Home, 24th St. and Grays Ferry Rd., Phila., Pa.
Avis K. White, Center Ossipee, R. F. D. No. 2, N. H.
Peter Slusarski, 358 Fourth Ave., Stevens Point, Wisconsin
Alojo, 1426 West 36th St., Los Angeles, Calif.
Annette Lunsford, 812 Fourth St., Oakmont, Pa.
Ola Cyrus, P. O. Box 67, Marion, Indiana
Roger D. Burnham, 19 South St., Agawam, Mass.
Laurie M. Bonnoitt, Box 713, Summerville, S. C.
John Woodward, 35 Catherine St., St. Albans, Vt.
Dolly Fronk, 1215 Eckert Rd., Monaca, Pa.
George S. Krasnov, 15 Latham Park, Montgomery Co., Penna.
Herbert H. Hillier, Box 100, Cooperstown, Pa.
Kate Glaser, 452 Williams Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Tessie Glaser, 452 Williams Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Marie Yohn, 204 Third St., Savanna, Ill.
Anthony Saumsevage, Jr., 59 N. Railroad Avenue, Frackville, Pa.
Katherine Baum, 1243 Juniata St., N. S. Pittsburgh, Penna.
Marx F. Kuntz, 643 Wales Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
Elmer Brown, 1126 South 10th Ave., Arcadia, Calif.
Emery Bucher, Veterans Home, Napa, Co., Calif.
Robert J. Delaney, 84 Washington St., Newburgh, New York
Melvin Lawrence, 537 Unruh St., Phila., Pa.
Henry Kramp, 1028 Prague St., San Francisco, Cal.
Peggy Johannsen, 21 South 16th St., New Hyde Park, L. I., N. Y.
Annetta Richardson, 545 Adams St., Gary, Ind.
Ralph C. Eisleben, 382 Madison St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Harry R. Stout, Jr., Headquarters 2nd Cav. Division, Camp Funston, Fort Riley, Kansas.
Lilith Lorraine, Route 8, Box 83-F, San Antonio, Texas.
John Jeffryes, 715 So. Hope St., Los Angeles, Calif.
W. O. Williamson, National Military Home, W. Los Angeles, Calif. Box 246.
Mark Cathal, 1930 E. 70th St., Cleveland, Ohio.
Edward S. May, 3019 Budlong Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.
Al Scott, 3838 LaSalle Ave. South, Los Angeles, Calif.
I. Fisher, 744 Park Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Getty E. Cash, Gaffney, S. C.
Mae De Laney, R R., Johannesburg, Mich.
Immanuel H. Boes, Route 1, Box 494, Napa Road, Vallejo, Calif.
Sgt. Charles E. MacDonald, O.D. & R. D., Co. E, Ft. Moultrie, S. C.
Myron H. Levenson, 5637 Hobart St., Pittsburgh, Pa.
Alexander MacDowell, 256 53rd St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Bob Middleton, 1220 W. 37th St., Los Angeles, Calif.
Mrs. Herlon Hughes, 1407 Arlington Ave., Lawton, Okla.
J. Shapiro, 270 Center St., New York, N. Y.
Robert Spencer, 1005 Ashman St., Midland, Mich.

We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

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30x4.50-21	21	1.85	.85
30x4.50-20	20	1.85	.85
28x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
29x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
30x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
31x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
32x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
33x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
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91x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
92x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
93x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
94x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
95x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
96x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
97x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
98x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
99x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85
100x4.75-19	19	1.85	.85

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Take a foreman's job, for example: He's a much more important man today than he was even a few years ago. Management depends on him. But he must be good. Nor will old methods do. His ideas must be new—as new as the machines he supervises—as young as the young men he must direct and handle.

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But just as an ordinary industrial worker can, through LaSalle Home Study, become a foreman, so a foreman, a cost clerk, a cost accountant, a mechanical engineer, a department manager, an inspector, an assistant superintendent, and all the other minor executives of any industrial organization—can fit themselves for that desirable job ahead—with its *tremendously* desirable rewards!

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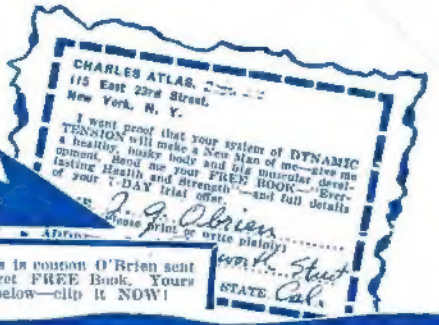
This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' Californian pupils.



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I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm,—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

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"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical **natural** method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—**my way.** I give you **no gadgets or contraptions to fool with.** You learn to develop your strength through **"Dynamic Tension."** You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

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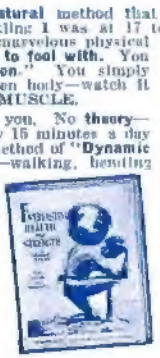

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book today. AT ONCE.

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I want the proof that your system of **"Dynamic Tension"** can help make me a New Man—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your **FREE** book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." No obligation.

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State.....

FOOT ITCH
ATHLETE'S FOOT

WHY TAKE CHANCES?

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ, whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected part with H. F. every night until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer?

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us $1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.

PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

Send Coupon

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28 at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is both contagious and infectious, and it may spread to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

GORE PRODUCTS, Inc. N.F.
847 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you $1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....